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THE

GOSPELS:

WITH

MORAL REFLECTIONS ON EACH VERSE.

By PASQUIER QUESNEL.

WITH

An Introductory Essay,

BY THE REV. DANIEL WILSON, D.D.

VICAR OF ISLINGTON. NOW BISHOP OF CALCUTTA.

REVISED BY THE REV. HENRY A. BOARDMAN, D.D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

THERE is only one way of accounting for the remarkable fact, that no edition of this work should, up to this period, have been issued from the American press. QUESNEL, if known at all, is known simply as having been a minister of the Roman Catholic Church; and Protestants have stood aloof from his commentary without examining it. Had they looked into its history, and that of its author, they would have learned that it brought down upon his head the anathemas of the Vatican; and that it was against these very "*Notes*" the famous Bull "UNIGENITUS"* was directed. In that Bull, one hundred and one propositions, for the most part of an eminently scriptural and evangelical character, are deduced from this work, and *condemned* as heretical. This fact should be sufficient to commend it to the attention of enlightened Protestants.

QUESNEL, it is true, could never throw off entirely the effects of his early training. To certain Romish errors he adhered to the last; and these disfigure, more or less, the original editions of his Notes. A large portion of the obnoxious passages were *omitted* in the English edition of the work; but a careful revision has brought to light a considerable number which had been overlooked. These have been expunged. To this point, indeed, the editor's task has been chiefly restricted—the cancelling of Romish errors—which must have impeded the circulation of the volumes and limited their usefulness.

As regards the merits of the work, eminent authorities have pro-

* See Appendix to Volume II.

nounced it the best practical commentary on the Evangelists extant. It is not, however, a "Commentary" in the usual signification of that term. It is neither a critical nor a popular "Exposition," but a collection of "*Moral Reflections* on each verse" of the Gospels. In this view it is unrivalled—a repository of original, striking, spiritual meditations, the absence of which could be supplied by no other work in our language. "We have nothing (says Bishop Wilson) in practical divinity so sweet, so spiritual, so interior as to the real life of grace—so rich, so copious, so original. We have nothing that extols the grace of God, and abases and lowers man, so entirely. We lessen not the value of our various admirable comments on the New Testament; they have each their particular excellencies. But none of them supersedes QUESNEL; none can supply that thorough insight into the world, the evil of sin, the life of faith and prayer, which he possesses."

In illustration of these topics the reader is referred to the copious and discriminating "Introduction" by Dr. Wilson. Meanwhile, the work is submitted to the public with the confidence, that it will speedily become, with very many Christians, of different names and sects, their favourite HAND-BOOK on the Gospels, and, through the blessing of God, an efficient help to their growth in grace, and their true spiritual enjoyment.

HENRY A. BOARDMAN.

PHILADELPHIA, *July* 3, 1855.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

THE following work is on all accounts deserving of peculiar attention. The author himself was a remarkable person, the book is of the highest value in its particular line, and the controversy connected with it is fruitful of the most important instruction. We propose to notice briefly the life and sentiments of the author; to review the chief excellencies and defects of his "Reflections;" and to give some account of the edition of them now presented.

I. Our present subject is curious and edifying: a man in the depths of a corrupt religion asserting the doctrines of the grace of Christ; connecting this with a most penetrating view of the spiritual communion of the soul with the Saviour, by the grace of the Holy Ghost; maintaining this religion during a long life; writing a book which excited the enmity of the church to which he belonged, which drew upon the author a long-continued persecution of the bitterest character, which yet has made its way, during one hundred and fifty years, into every part of Christendom, and which stands at this moment unrivalled in its particular class—a book which has, in its general strain, all the unction and interior piety of the purest Protestant writers, though it is mingled and debased in other parts with many gross theological errors.

Such an author, and such a work, warrant, require, demand notice, in a day like the present.

PASQUIER QUESNEL was born at Paris, July 14, 1634. His grandfather was a native of Scotland, but whether a Roman Catholic or not, does not appear. His father was most probably of that persuasion; and our Pasquier, after being educated at the University of Paris, entered into the Religious Congregation of the Oratoire, in 1657. He devoted himself, from his earliest years, to the study of the sacred Scriptures and of the fathers of the church—a combination most dangerous in a Roman Catholic student, because he connects them with the notions of tradition and authoritative comment. He began soon to compose books of piety, chiefly for the use of the young people intrusted to his care. It was in this course that he was led to write the first portion of those Reflections

which, thirty years afterward, kindled so ardent a controversy. One or two persons of distinction, having been much delighted with them, encouraged him to extend his notes to the whole of the Gospels, for at first they comprehended only some portions of our Lord's life; and they thus gradually swelled into a very important work, which gave a character to the age in which it appeared. It was in 1671 that the first edition was published, under the sanction of the then Bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne; for it was not uncommon for persons of that station, if men of piety, to authorize and circulate works of devotion, with the sufferance of their superiors, so long as the peculiar tenets of the Roman Catholic church were intermingled, and no great stir was excited about the evangelical truths which they contained.

Quesnel continually added to his Reflections during the rest of his life. He embraced the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles in his plan, besides enriching, by more than one-half, the original notes. His last years were dedicated to the preparation of a still more enlarged edition, with much new matter, which was published in 1727.* Nearly sixty years were thus employed more or less upon this pleasing and elevated task; another proof, among a thousand, that nothing really excellent is the fruit of haste. When you come to understand the real facts, you discover that the books which last, which form eras in theology, which go out with a large measure of the Divine blessing, are the result of much prayer and meditation, of thoughts often revolved and matured by degrees. Thus new and important lights irradiate the mind, the proximate ideas are suggested by time and occasion, errors and excrescences are detected, topics assume a new face and consistency, prayer brings down the influences of grace, all the powers of the mind are brought to bear upon the inquiry, and something is produced for the honour of God and the permanent welfare of his church.

One great work is commonly as much as one man produces; and this the result of unexpected incident, rather than of express intention, in the first instance. Pascal left his Thoughts—Bacon, his Novum Organum—Butler, his Analogy—Leighton, his Peter—Scott, his Commentary—Cecil, his Remains—Quesnel, his Reflections,—a life having been, in each case, devoted to the particular inquiry; and the form, and magnitude, and importance of each work having been least of all in the first intentions of the writers. Pride conceives great designs, and accomplishes little: humility dreads the promise of difficult undertakings, and accomplishes much.

Quesnel's sentiments on religion were now becoming known, as his book spread. His talents, his elegant style, his brilliancy of imagina-

* Eight years after his death. None of the earlier editions are complete.

tion, were acknowledged. His deep and penetrating piety was not immediately understood. His whole life seems to have been dedicated to the love of his crucified Saviour. The fall and total corruption of our nature, the distinct necessity of grace for the production of any thing really good, the grateful adoration of the purposes and will of God toward his elect,—these formed the foundation of Quesnel's religious principles. They were not held merely as doctrines; they were insisted on, felt, followed out into their consequences. A deep and tender humility appears in his spirit, a deadness of affection as to the world, a perception of joy and peace in the spiritual life, a faith full of childlike simplicity and repose of soul on the grace and power of Christ; a minute conscientiousness in the application of his principles to his whole conduct, a skill in detecting false motives, a bold and uncompromising courage in speaking truth,—these were the fruits of the great scriptural principles which he had imbibed.

Mixed, however, with these sound and elevated principles and habits were many great errors and superstitions, flowing from his education in the bosom of the apostate church. His study of the fathers, instead of being confined to a fair and scriptural consultation of their writings, was cramped by his reliance on them as authoritative guides. They warped his judgment, instead of assisting it. The doctrine of justification was confounded with that of sanctification; and though both were bottomed upon grace in the most decisive manner, yet so wide a departure from the statements of Scripture, could not but have an unfavourable influence upon the whole tenor of his religion. Thus, like Pascal, Nicole, Arnauld, St. Cyran, and the other great names of the same school, the highest order of excellence on capital points was combined with some glaring errors. Deep spirituality of mind, unaffected humility, holy love to the divine Saviour, a simple repose on the grace of the Holy Spirit, a life of devoted and courageous obedience, were associated with much uncommanded prostration of the understanding to human authority, many dangerous superstitions, and much uncharitable condemnation of Protestants.

What an inconsistent creature is man! and, at the same time, what a powerful principle is the divine grace which can raise him, notwithstanding many errors, to such an elevated point of holy love! What force can one principle, well followed out, acquire over the whole character! With what charity should we judge of the persons of individuals, in the most corrupt churches, while we still contend against those churches for the faith as once delivered unto the saints! And let Protestants look to themselves: we may have a beam in our own eye, which prevents our clear discernment, when we attempt to pluck out the mote from an eye like that of Quesnel. Probably our pride of

intellect, our cold, systematic, metaphysical theology, our feeble faith, our tame and worldly standard of practical piety, our little humiliation and small measure of real prostration of soul before God, and our negligence of fasting and prayer, may often be more offensive to our heavenly Father than many superstitions of the humble and spiritually-minded Roman Catholic. Intellectual acuteness is nothing compared to heart-felt love. His is often the fault of the understanding; ours of the affections. His is an external, incidental effect of the circumstances of a false education; ours the daring dictate of curiosity and conceit. His is connected with submission to God; ours with rebellion. His is the error of the head; ours of the heart.

But we return to our narrative. It was in 1681 that persecution first burst out against Quesnel. The new doctrines (for truth, when it reappears in force, is new to fallen man, especially in a very corrupt church) began to attract attention. Numbers espoused them. The Jesuits were the first to take the alarm. Harlai, Archbishop of Paris, informed of our Pasquier's sentiments, obliged him to quit the capital. He took refuge at Orleans. Three years afterward, he fled to Brussels, to avoid the necessity of signing an absurd formulary, in which the condemnation of Jansenism was allied with the renunciation of the natural philosophy of Descartes. Here he joined the great Arnauld, and received his last instructions. He devoted himself now to the continuation of his Reflections; and, in 1694, published an edition which comprised, for the first time, the whole of the New Testament. The Jesuits had not yet prevailed. Louis-Antoine de Noailles, afterward Archbishop of Vares, and cardinal, was now Bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne, and scrupled not to recommend the book to his diocese. The Bishops of Limoges, Agen, Montpelier, and Sonez, afterward did the same.

The celebrated Bossuet likewise joined in defending the book, and the Cardinal de Noailles also, when the Jesuits publicly attacked them. Bossuet, in his earlier life, seems to have inclined more to the sentiments of St. Augustine and Jansenius than to contrary notions of the Jesuits. The controversy with Fénélon had not yet soured his mind, nor his elevation at court cooled his piety. An idea may be formed of the immense circulation of the Reflections, and the prodigious eagerness with which they were sought for, from what the Bishop of Meaux observes:—"This book, which contained at first only the texts of the Gospels and the notes upon them, was received with an avidity and a desire of edification which seemed to revive, in our days, the primitive zeal of Christians for the continual meditation on the word of God night and day. And when the notes on the rest of the New Testament were added, the complete work had so great a success, that all the countries where the French language is known, and the royal city more par-

ticularly, were filled with it,—the booksellers could not meet the eagerness of the faithful—unnumbered editions were published one after another, and instantly taken off;—so that we may apply to this happy event what is written in the Acts, that the word of the Lord grew mightily, and that the number of its zealous readers increased every day."

Such was the effect which the persecution and the extraordinary merit of the work concurred, under the blessing of God, to produce.

But further extremities were resorted to by the Jesuits. The Reflections had been before the world more than twenty years. Some disturbance had been made, and the author had been driven from his country. But the book had a prodigious sale; influential names were attached to it; it was exciting more and more the hatred of the human heart, on the one hand, and gaining converts and readers almost innumerable, on the other. Satan would not let this state of things continue. The real grace of God, though mixed with error, was maintained, and maintained boldly, in the Reflections; man was laid low; the Saviour was exalted; the power of fallen nature to recover itself was denied; the Holy Ghost was honoured; the world and its pleasures were uncompromisingly exposed; a new and holy life was delineated and insisted on; heaven and hell were plainly exhibited. This was enough: nothing could redeem such unpardonable faults in the eyes of the Jesuits. They could not endure the strong light thrown on the nature of man and the one person of the Saviour. They saw acutely enough (though perhaps Quesnel did not) that such principles went to undermine Popery. They began their schemes anew. They attempted to detach the powerful defenders of Pasquier. The Cardinal de Noailles was rudely assailed. Quesnel, undaunted, prosecuted the improvement of his book, and wrote a prodigious number of occasional pamphlets. He composed also several larger treatises, on the "Priesthood and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ; Elevations of heart toward Jesus Christ in his passion and death; The Blessedness of the Christian's death; Christian Prayers; Prayers to our Saviour Jesus Christ, for young people and those who desire to read the word of God, and especially the Gospel; Tradition of the Romish Church on the Predestination of the Saints, and on Efficacious Grace."

These productions only augmented the rage of his enemies. The impression of their excellence, as works of piety, may be judged of from what the celebrated Father de Tournemine is reported to have said: "That two pages of the Christian Prayers contained more real unction than all that had issued from the pen of the Jesuits, not excepting Bourdaloue."

In the mean time, Quesnel kept himself in privacy at Brussels. The Jesuits, however, contrived to discover his retreat; and persuaded Philip V. of Spain (whose conscience they directed) to send an order to the

bishop of Malines to arrest him. He was now cast into prison for the name of Christ; and would probably have lingered there the rest of his days, if he had not been rescued by a Spanish gentleman, who succeeded in penetrating the walls of his prison, and in freeing him from his chains. He fled to Amsterdam, under the protection of the new Protestant States, who had so gloriously succeeded in establishing their liberty. He was soon publicly condemned as a heretic, and a contumacious and seditious person—names ever ready to be attached to the followers of the humble Saviour, especially under a superstitious and despotic government. The court at Rome was next appealed to, and a decree of Clement XI., condemnatory of the Reflections, was obtained. Nothing, however, could stop the sale. The work spread wider and wider. Editions were multiplied. All the world were eager to read a work so loudly denounced by the papal chair. Thus does persecution promote truth. Never would Quesnel's Reflections have been read by one thousandth part of those who have now, for a century and a half, been edified by them, unless the Jesuits had pursued the book with so bitter a hatred.

An arrêt of council was afterward obtained from Louis XIV., in order to suppress the work. This was in 1711, after it had been forty years before the world.

At length the Jesuits urged the decrepit and superstitious monarch, through Madame de Maintenon, to force the court of Rome to enter into a detailed examination of the book, and thus settle, as they hoped, the agitated minds of men. Three years were consumed in details. At last, in 1714, the bull, known by its first word, UNIGENITUS, was issued, in which one hundred and one propositions were extracted from Quesnel, and specifically condemned as heretical and dangerous; a step which, like every other since the fatal Council of Trent, (the band and chain of popish errors,) tended to separate the church of Rome more and more widely from the true foundation of the gospel, and to brand upon her forehead the broadest marks of departure from the faith of Christ. The spirit of Rome was never more graphically delineated than in her selecting all the most express points of the gospel, and denouncing them, coolly and avowedly, as heretical and erroneous.

The impression made at the time on the minds of pious Protestants is seen in the preface to the excellent Mr. Henry's Comment on the Gospels, written just after Europe had been filled with the conversations which the bull excited. He gives the following specimen of the propositions:—

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the effectual principle of all manner of good; is necessary for every good action; for, without it, nothing is done, nay, nothing can be done. That it is the effect of a

sovereign grace, and the operation of the almighty hand of God. That when God accompanies his word with the internal power of his grace, it operates in the soul the obedience it demands. That faith is the first grace, and the fountain of all others. That it is in vain for us to call God our Father, if we do not cry to him with a spirit of love. That there is no God, nor religion, where there is no charity. That the Catholic church comprehends the angels, and all the elect and just men of the earth of all ages. That it has the Word incarnate for its Head, and all the saints for its members. That it is profitable and necessary at all times, in all places, and for all sorts of persons, to know the Holy Scriptures; and that the holy obscurity of the word of God is no reason for the laity not reading it. That the Lord's day ought to be sanctified by reading books of piety, especially the Holy Scriptures; and that to forbid Christians from reading the Scriptures, is to prohibit the use of light to the children of light." Mr. Henry adds, "Many such positions as these, which the spirit of every good Christian cannot but relish as true and good, are condemned, by the pope's bull, as impious and blasphemous. By this it appears, that popery is still the same thing that ever it was—an enemy to the knowledge of the Scriptures, and to the honour of divine grace."

A merely secular policy was so openly followed, both by the Christian King, as he was termed, and the supple court which yielded to his interference, that the truth of the doctrines scarcely came into question. It was the policy of Rome which was consulted. The Abbe Renaudot relates, that, on entering once the cabinet of the pope, who was fond of literary men, he found him reading Quesnel's book.—"This is an extraordinary performance," said the pontiff; "we have no one at Rome capable of writing in this manner. I wish I could have the author by me." Yet this very man issued first the decree, and then the bull, which condemned the work. On the feeble mind of Louis, superstition and the Jesuits had taken up their seat. The prince who revoked the Edict of Nantes in the prime of life, was not likely, in the last stage of decrepitude, to resist the influence which sought to overthrow an individual foe.

But it is more lamentable to observe that Bossuet and Fénélon seemed to have joined in the persecution. The former had, some years before, defended the book; but he appears to have shrunk from protecting it or the author, when popularity took another course. And Fénélon—the amiable, the lovely, the pious Fénélon—took an active part in hastening the condemnation at Rome. His correspondence, lately published, demonstrates the interest he felt, and exhibits the commendations he bestowed, with his own hand, on the divine who drew up the bull. Haughty orthodoxy and mystical devotion are thus found to yield to

the torrent of papal authority, and to lend their aid to support a corrupt and tyrannical church.

The greatest difficulty was found in obtaining the reception of the bull. Nine French bishops, assembled under the Cardinal de Noailles, determined to wait for further information, before it was registered. It was not till 1718, that it was definitely accepted. In the mean time, all Christendom rang with the praises of Quesnel's doctrine. Surreptitious editions were multiplied; and the attempt to infix upon the peculiarities of the gospel the character of impiety and heresy, stamped the deepest mark of reprobation on the church which issued the condemnation.

Quesnel survived the publication of the bull six years. These he spent in writing works of piety, and in preparing the edition of the Reflections which, as we have observed, appeared in 1727, with all the new matter which he had noted in the margin of his copy. Admirable was almost every additional thought; and, with an undaunted courage, did the venerable saint persevere in the doctrine of the grace of God. He employed himself, likewise, in forming Jansenist churches at Amsterdam, where he died, December 2, 1719, aged eighty-six.

He had a mind above his birth and fortune; a singular faculty of writing with ease, with unction, and with elegance. He enjoyed a robust health, which neither study, nor journeys, nor continual trouble of mind could affect. His manners were pure and irreproachable, and his whole soul was inflamed with the love of God his Saviour. His book was honoured as the instrument of incalculable good. Like the "Confessions of St. Augustine," the "Imitation of Thomas à Kempis," and the "Thoughts of Pascal," "Quesnel's Reflections" have been a light in a dark church—the means of guiding thousands and thousands of souls —the instrument of consolation to numbers of all churches and confessions—a touchstone to detect and bring out the real spirit of Popery—the unequalled pattern, in its own way, of a profitable and devout study of the New Testament.

II. But from this notice of the author and his sentiments generally, let us proceed to some considerations upon the great work itself. Let us remark the CHARACTERISTIC EXCELLENCIES of these Reflections, and the CHIEF FAULTS which are mingled with them.

(I.) The CHARACTERISTIC EXCELLENCIES of the Reflections are—the prominence given to the doctrine of grace; the union of this with the most interior views of spiritual religion; the application of every thing to the practical purposes of the Christian life; the detection of the corruptions of the world, of the human heart, and of the false professor of Christianity; a high reverence for the Holy Scriptures; a constant

regard, in all the observations, to the duties, temptations, and success of the minister of religion; and a holy love and dependence of heart on the blessed Saviour and the influences of the Holy Spirit.

1. The DOCTRINE OF GRACE is the basis of Quesnel's theology. Every part of his work is penetrated with it. He refers every thing to its operations. He lays man low, as a fallen, ignorant, impotent creature. He traces back to the gracious will of God, in election, all the streams which flow from it as the source of salvation. He seems to have a delight in illustrating the freedom of this grace, and the difference between its effects and the works of mere nature, and reason, and philosophy. His own soul appears to have felt more of a sense of obligation to the mercy and pity of God, from his own experience and his observation upon the state of man generally, than almost any writer we know.

Take the first example that falls under our eye: Matt. xi. 25–27. "The full sight of God's mercies toward his elect, of their preference, distinction, and separation from the corrupt mass, deserves the praise and acknowledgment of Christ's heart."—"Simplicity and humility are their distinguishing character. My God and my Saviour, imprint on my heart this amiable character, which is the mark of thine elect!"—"God is master of his own gifts; but he divides them by a will full of wisdom, and upon motives which are in himself, and not in us."—"How lovely is this dependence! O Jesus, I accept it with joy. I desire to depend on thee," etc.

This is a capital point. It honours God without reserve. And if it be not unscripturally stated, it promotes humility, love, and spirituality of mind in the highest degree.

2. And in Quesnel it is ever united with the most interior views of A PRACTICAL, SPIRITUAL, AND ELEVATED PIETY. We scarcely know any writer so thoroughly practical as he, in the true sense of the term. Not in the sense of enforcing practice without motive and doctrine, but in the sense of making doctrine the constant and unvaried motive and spring of obedience. The grace of God is not stated as an abstract dogma, or defended and cleared in an argumentative and speculative manner; but is uniformly stated as the first spring of that communion with God, that delight in him as a Father, that inward life of love and repose and gratitude which constitutes the essential difference between the living and the nominal Christian. The author has an interior view of religion as seated in the breast, nourished by the grace from which it sprung, and rising up toward God as the Fountain of felicity. Yet there is nothing of mysticism in this. It is the genuine, scriptural, sound view of that union with God through Jesus Christ which reunites what the fall had dissevered, and replaces man in a commerce with the Father of spirits.

Let this be a specimen: John xv. 7–10. "Observe here three sorts of union, or three conditions, in order to obtain from God that which we desire:—1. We must be united to Christ by a lively faith, and by charity. 2. We must be united to him by a love of his truth, and a frequent meditation upon his word. 3. The third is prayer. It is by this that the branch draws the juice and sap of the vine, and receives from thence more plentiful nourishment. God chooses us to be Christ's members, and on purpose to work in and by us all the good we do. Thou God of my heart, who didst first love me, cause me to continue with perseverance in thy love, that thy love may continue eternally in me! The fidelity of my love toward God, and the adherence of my heart to his law, can be nothing but the effect of thy almighty grace, O Jesus, vouchsafe, I beseech thee, to produce this effect in me, in honour of that which thy Father produced in thee!"

3. But the application of every thing to the PRACTICAL PURPOSES OF THE CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE is a further excellent point in our author. The interior joys and peace of grace he causes to appear in their fruits, he carries out naturally and spontaneously into their appropriate effects. Love, faith, hope, the promises, the influences of the Spirit, prayer, the whole inward testimony of religion to the soul, are most tenderly and sweetly conducted to their due consequences, in the righteousuess of the life and the discharge of the relative duties.

Hear how he speaks: Matt. v. 14. "Of what advantage is it to a Christian to be a light, in respect of his faith and calling, if he be nothing but darkness as to his life and actions? If an infidel, instead of seeing the light of the gospel and the purity of faith shine in our conversation, discovers nothing there but the darkness of sin, we certainly blind instead of enlightening him."

The reader will observe in these quotations, much of that originality and force of observation which we noticed as distinguishing the cast of his mind. There is a clear and striking manner of putting things, which has, no doubt, much contributed to the great circulation and usefulness of the work.

Perhaps this ingenuity appears nowhere more clearly than in his remarks upon our Lord's miracles and parables. Every thing is turned to one purpose, the illustration of the grace of God, the promotion of the interior life of grace, and the fruitful obedience to be produced by it. How beautiful is the following reflection! Matt. xiii. 8. "The good ground is the good heart; none is such, but through the mercy of God and the grace of Jesus Christ. It was a mercy peculiar to thee, O Lord, to purchase at so dear a rate such barren and accursed ground, full of thorns and briers, and fit only to be burned, that thou mightest make it a rich and blessed soil, fertile in every kind of good fruit. Blind and

miserable is that man who attributes this work to himself, and gives not thee the glory of it, O my Saviour."

The ejaculations in these and similar sentences are also observable: the pious mind is thus led up to Christ in brief prayers; the heart is touched at once; controversy and dispute give way to devotion; and the deepest practical ends of Christianity are promoted. We know of few writers who attain this in the degree which Quesnel does: he lives by prayer.

4. The detection of THE CORRUPTIONS OF THE WORLD, of the HUMAN HEART, and of the FALSE PROFESSOR of Christianity, is what you would expect from a writer so qualified by natural talent for acute observation, and so sanctified by divine mercy to make the best use of it. He is truly, what most Roman Catholics are only in profession, devoted to God, and abstracted from earthly things. His mind is dead to the world. He detects its snares, condemns its vanities, exposes its deceits, shuns its maxims. Hear what he says on the occasion of the daughter of Herodias: Matt. xiv. 6. "The diversions of the world, feasting and dancing, are but too commonly the occasions of sin. After so fatal an example as this, can we in the least doubt whether balls are not snares for souls, destructive of chastity and modesty, and a pernicious invention to awaken and excite the passions."

This is excellent in the highest degree; but mark with what point he turns and addresses mothers: "Unhappy mother, who exposes her daughter to the shipwreck which herself has suffered, and makes her the instrument of her passion and revenge, and the murderer of a saint!"

And then notice the solemnity of the caution he subjoins: "God grant that many mothers may take warning by this example, and have it before their eyes, when they are about to introduce their daughters at court!"

Thus he pursues the world in other passages which we need not cite. Nor will we quote places which prove his skill in exposing the human heart. He shows it to be nothing, by nature, but falsehood and sin. He declares that whatever good it has, must proceed from another source. He breaks out continually into prayer, for the cleansing virtues of Jesus Christ.

The false professor of Christianity is dealt with in a manner equally faithful. Could any Protestant write better than he does on Matt. xxiii. 23. "To be exact in little things, and to omit such as are essential to religion and piety, what is this but to deceive ourselves? Unhappy is that man who rests secure in a vain and conceited exactness about the niceties of devotion, instead of applying himself to his proper duties, to the reformation of his heart, and to the faithful observation of justice and charity toward his neighbour: this is a kind of delusion more dangerous to some souls than an open temptation to sin."

5. But we proceed to notice another characteristic, HIS HIGH REVERENCE FOR THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. Our author's mind is penetrated with a sense of the Holy Scriptures, of their divine inspiration, of their authority over the conscience, of the peculiar virtue they possess for nourishing the Christian heart. He conceives that what God has spoken by his Spirit is exactly adapted for that divine life which the same God, by the same Spirit, creates in the human breast. He looks on the Bible as the waters of life, flowing to assuage the thirst which the new creature experiences. "We must be united to God," (says our author on John xv. 7,) "by a love of his truth, and a frequent meditation upon his word, which is the rule of our desires, as being the book of God's designs, to which all our prayers and desires ought to be conformable. It is not sufficient to have faith and charity, we must continually nourish them with the word of God. To read it carelessly, and for fashion's sake, is directly contrary to that reverence which is due to it, and to our own spiritual advantage. It must be imprinted strongly on our minds, or, as it were, engraved deep on our hearts, that it may abide therein. Nothing but love can perform this, as nothing but love can cause us to practise it."

Such remarks are of the first order, drawn from the very unction of the Holy Spirit—golden observations, the fruit of deep meditation on the blessed Scriptures.

6. But there is a peculiarity in our Quesnel's Reflections still more important to ministers—he has especial regard in his book TO THE DUTIES, THE TEMPTATIONS, AND THE SUCCESS OF MINISTERS. He very frequently frames a series of six, eight, or ten qualifications of the faithful pastor. At some times he delineates his spirit and labours; at others, he contrasts these with the indolence and unfaithfulness of the worldly-minded teacher. Now he insists on the humility, spirituality, tenderness of heart, prayerfulness of the true shepherd; and then he exposes the pride, secularity, love of applause, selfishness of the false one. He especially dwells on the larger unction of the Holy Spirit, which rests on the diligent and spiritually-minded pastor, the brighter knowledge of the Scriptures, the more copious blessings of grace, the wider success.

This is an excellency quite his own. QUESNEL'S REFLECTIONS ARE THE MINISTER'S MANUAL. Look at most of our commentators; they are occupied in expounding, clearing, reconciling the divine word; but they do not seem to study it under a deep and penetrating sense of ministerial responsibility. The labours, temptations, aims, success of the minister, do not appear to have been present with the commentator's mind. Quesnel studied the New Testament as a minister for ministers.

"A true minister of Christ, after his example," (Matt. ix. 35, et seq.,) "is neither detained in one place by the sweetness of the applause of

some, nor discouraged from his ministry by the jealousy and calumny of others. There is an extreme want of labourers in the church. There are abundance who bear this character, but few who really work; and a great many who work in the Lord's name, but very few whom he will own for his ministers. Jesus Christ requires for labourers, not such as by intrigues and human solicitations assume the office, but such as are the fruit of the church's prayers: not such as enter into the harvest, to make themselves the lords of it, but those who labour only for the profit of the Lord of it; not such as in the repose of an idle life enjoy the honour and temporal advantages of the ministry, but such as work hard, like daily labourers. We do not sufficiently comprehend how much it is our duty and interest to pray for the obtaining good bishops, good curates, holy preachers, full of zeal, knowledge, and disinterestedness."

"The mysterious fishing," (Luke v. 5,) "represents that of souls. In vain the preacher labours to convert them, if God gives not his blessing. It is upon his grace that he must rely, and not upon his own eloquence and strength. The fishing of the night is an unsuccessful and unfortunate fishing, without light, without mission, without Christ's assistance, in a bark where he is not, and without his direction. The fishing of the day is a blessed fishing, which is carried on by the light of faith, in the sight of the Sun of Righteousness, with confidence in the promise of his assistance to the end of the world, and in the midday of truth."

7. But we hasten to notice—what scarcely requires distinct notice—Quesnel's HOLY LOVE AND DEPENDENCE OF HEART ON THE BLESSED SAVIOUR, AND THE INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. This is the inspiring theme which dwells on his tongue; this is the secret charm which elevates his Reflections; this is the master-key which unlocks the treasures of his divinity. All our preceding points derive their virtue from this. The whole soul of Quesnel is filled with love to Christ, and holy dependence on his grace and Holy Spirit.

In this he stands far superior to almost all the writers of his church. Not only does he far surpass Massillon, Bourdaloue, Bossuet, De la Rue, Soanen, Neuville, and the other great French preachers, but also Pascal, Nicole, and the other ornaments of the Jansenist school. Even Thomas à Kempis himself, sweet and sacred as he is, must yield the palm to Quesnel, as to distinct views of the grace and power of Christ, and the operations of his Spirit. Nothing is high, nothing pure, nothing efficacious, nothing permanent, nothing salutary for souls, according to Quesnel, but the name and grace of the incarnate God.

(II.) What, then, it may be asked, can be THE MATERIAL FAULTS in a work of such varied excellence?

They are many, and of very considerable importance; and it is the

more necessary to state them in an Introductory Essay to a republication of the Reflections, for two reasons:—

The one, that THE GRACE OF GOD MAY BE MAGNIFIED in bringing light out of such darkness. We cannot feel a real scriptural interest and delight in contemplating the character of Quesnel, unless we clearly see the thick darkness which, on some questions, oppressed his mind. We must state his errors fully and unreservedly, not from a spirit of envy or false triumph, but in order to glorify the operations of grace, and to magnify the virtue and power of that truth which dwelt in him.

A second reason is, that we may caution young students against any attempts TO LESSEN THE EVIL OF RELIGIOUS ERRORS because they happen to be associated, in such a case as that before us, with very extraordinary excellencies. In a day like the present, it is most necessary to be on our guard. Corruptions in doctrine are gradual. Declines in the faith almost always begin with pious and eminent persons, whose high attainments throw a veil over their faults, and hand them down with a species of authority. The direct tendency of the false doctrines, the superstitions, the tyranny over the conscience, the prohibition of the Scriptures, maintained by the church of Rome, is to ignorance, self-righteousness, irreligion, unholiness. Quesnel and such men are the exception, and the rare exception—not the rule. The church of Rome never admitted and espoused, as a body, such men as Quesnel, Pascal, Nicole; but condemned, persecuted, and cast them out. If our author be quoted as a proof of the excellent graces which may be found in a Roman Catholic, let it be remembered, that he was a Roman Catholic persecuted, exiled, condemned; let it be remembered, that the very truths which he asserted with so much zeal, were culled out from his book, were arranged in one hundred and one propositions, and branded as heretical.

With these cautions upon our mind, the reading of Quesnel's book may be most beneficial. We are delighted to see in his case the fact, that a very high measure of light, holiness, love, joy, deadness to the world, interior union and communion with God, real spiritual religion, may consist with many defects, many errors, many grievous false doctrines. There are few studies more profitable than the calm and unprejudiced contemplation of such a character as Quesnel. Few things more tend to exalt the grace and mercy of Christ; few things more tend to wean us from following too implicitly any human teacher; few things more warn us against adopting ALL the opinions of any human writer.

But let us classify the defects in our excellent author. They are either derived from a want of clearness in the parcelling out and dividing the truths which he held, or they spring from the actual insertion of unscriptural doctrines and tenets, or they arise from an erroneous system of interpreting the language of Holy Scripture.

1. There is A WANT OF CLEARNESS IN THE PARCELLING OUT AND DIVIDING THE CAPITAL TRUTHS WHICH HE REALLY HELD. He believed most cordially and fully all fundamental truths, as we have repeatedly shown, but he had not the blessing of a pure education in scriptural divinity; and therefore truth lay in his mind undivided, unarranged,—or rather divided and arranged falsely and dangerously.

The doctrine of justification by faith only, without the deeds of the law, Quesnel did not explicitly, though he most certainly did implicitly, believe. Sometimes he states the justification of man clearly and fully; but in general, obscurely and confusedly.

This is from the different truths of the gospel not being parcelled out and divided by a free and independent study of the Holy Scriptures. The church of Rome confounds justification and sanctification. The church of Rome holds merits, and satisfactions, and works of supererogation. Quesnel is hampered, cramped, by these decisions. His noble spirit, taught of God and raised upward by his grace, is fettered by the bonds of educational prepossession, and church decrees, and writings of fathers. This is the chief defect in Quesnel, as it is in most of the Roman Catholic writers. I know not one that holds clearly and consistently the doctrine of a free justification as taught by St. Paul, and defended by Luther and the Reformers.

But this defect, being qualified by an unreserved belief in the doctrine of grace, in the merciful election of God, the utter inefficiency of man to any thing good, and the reward of mercy, was, in Quesnel's case, as in St. Augustine's, not a fundamental error, but a want of order and clearness in his theological creed.

Another confusion in our author's mind respects the sacrament of baptism, to which he seems uniformly to attribute the actual communication of the divine life, and the positive infusion of the new principle of grace; though no writer can more strongly insist on the necessity of a spiritual change in every human being, in order to salvation. To attribute too much to baptism as an *opus operatum*, is not, however, a defect peculiar to Roman Catholics. It is blind human nature, fond of substituting the sign for the thing signified.

Another point where the want of a right division of the word of truth is apparent, relates to heretics and schismatics, and what he considers the unity of the church. His mind is so possessed with the Roman Catholic exposition of the doctrine of the church, the keys, the power of absolution, the primacy of Peter, the limits of grace, and non-salvation out of the church, that much confusion appears. That he held the freedom and efficacy of divine grace, the spiritual union of all the elect, the invisible body of Christ, consisting of believers of all ages and all parts of the world, is perfectly certain. Yet at times

he speaks confusedly, and, if strictly interpreted, in a contradictory manner.

2. There are faults arising from the ACTUAL INSERTION OF UNSCRIPTURAL DOCTRINES AND TENETS. These peep out, as it were, from under the large and heavenly furniture of divine knowledge and grace with which he is blessed.

On some points his mind appears to be filled with gross darkness; and if the grievous errors to which he clung occupied any considerable space in the whole body of the Reflections, they would totally destroy its vital excellency, and alter its whole character. But these traits of his corrupt church appear but rarely; are qualified by important concessions; seem the mere effects of education and habit, contrary to the prevailing tenor of his sentiments; are the fragments and remaining links of that chain of darkness in which the grace of God found him, and from which it released his soul.

The false doctrines here referred to are gross, and some of them idolatrous; but there are other slighter, though not unimportant errors, which spring from the confusion of truth in his mind to which we have already adverted, and which are less fundamental in their nature. They may be chiefly traced to the sources we have pointed out: the defects on justification, baptism, and the church.

We state these things that the darkness may be seen and felt. We hide nothing. We apologize for nothing. The full exhibition of the real case is essential to our whole purpose. Let the extraordinary phenomena be considered. Here is a man full of the Holy Ghost, full of the deepest humility of soul, full of the purest and most spiritual love to the Saviour; born of God, and following God in a new and holy obedience—a man who drew upon himself the persecution of the corrupt church of which he is a member, by his bold avowal of the doctrines of grace—a man whose writings have been a blessing to thousands upon thousands; and yet this same man believes, in a certain way, these gross errors, is infected with these extraordinary superstitions, remains a member of this apostate church.

What shall we say to such a commixture of light and darkness, but that it forms an additional confirmation of that doctrine of the corruption of man which laid the foundation, in this very Quesnel's mind, of all the humility which adorned him? What shall we say, but that where the heart is right, the head may be, in many important respects, wrong? What shall we say, but that where the capital points of contrition and penitence for sin, an humble faith in the merits and sacrifice of Christ, and an entire dependence on the operations of the Spirit, possess the soul, much defect in knowledge and theological furniture of mind may exist?

If these are the real facts of the case—and I apprehend they are so—then it is no use arguing against them; the point is to draw the proper instruction from such phenomena.

And when we see the eminent, the almost unparalleled attainments in the spiritual life of such men as Pascal, Nicole, Quesnel,—when we see their love to God, their separation from the vanities of the world, their holy communion of prayer, their sense of the unutterable evil of sin, their apprehension of the divine grace, as the source of all good, their simple, fervent, self-denying love to Christ, their compassion and zeal for the souls of their fellow-creatures,—we must acknowledge, that intellectual errors are less valid to overthrow, than moral and affectionate emotions of the soul are powerful to sustain, the spiritual life. The Christian lives by love, not by doctrine. If there be light enough in the understanding to lead to an acquaintance with ourselves and with Jesus Christ, our attainments will go on in proportion to our holy affections, our fervent prayers, our measure of the Holy Spirit, our self-abasement, and our union with Christ, the Head of all influence and grace.

3. But we shall be reminded of a third source of the defects in Quesnel's Reflections—A DEFECTIVE SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES; we mean not a totally false system, but one materially erroneous, defective in its principles, necessarily leaving the interpreter in uncertainty and darkness continually. The false principle in the system is, the interpreting according to human authorities and tradition, and not according to the real meaning of the Holy Spirit in the word, gathered by a sound judgment and a careful examination of the Scriptures themselves. To interpret by the fathers, is to make the New Testament a nose of wax. To impose a certain meaning upon Scripture, instead of drawing all our opinions from that sacred book, is fundamentally erroneous. Language is the mere instrument of communicating ideas. In using human language, the inspiring Spirit employs ideas which already form part of the stock of human knowledge. This is the point from which we must set out. Human language must be interpreted by the ordinary laws of human language: otherwise, we have no revelation of God's will intelligible to man.

All Quesnel's errors spring from the trammels and bonds which the church of Rome imposes on her members. He interprets as he is bidden, not as the truth of things demand. An enlightened understanding as to the main truths of Christianity, and a holy heart, led him, indeed, into substantial truth; but his fathers, and councils, and decrees, and bulls, perverted the operations of his fine powers on many important occasions.

This appears in two principal respects. He applies, without authority, every expression and incident he can, to establish the doctrines or tenets

of his church, instead of bringing these doctrines and tenets to the standard of the Bible itself.

The other mischief is, he gives scope to a fruitful imagination; and, instead of interpreting the meaning of the Scriptures soberly, he flies off upon glosses, accommodations, pretty thoughts, secondary uses of the passages before him. The attentive reader will perceive this immediately; and these remarks have extended to such a length, that we cannot stop to make citations.

To occasional playfulness of fancy, we have no objection; to the strong and hyperbolical language of the emotions, we have no objection; to the flights of devotional poetry, we have no objection; to parable, allegory, metaphor, we have no objection; to the accommodation of historical incidents to the illustration of spiritual things, we have no objection. All these methods we find used in the Sacred Scriptures. The established laws of interpretation apply to them, as they do to the plainest parts of the Bible. Men know how to interpret an act of parliament, when that is before them, as they know how to interpret a heroic poem or an ode. If there be true faith in the heart, which seeks honestly to learn and to do the will of God, this faith will set to work all that common sense, all that integrity, all that spirit of prayer, all that application of the powers of the mind to the language of the Scriptures, all that entire submission of the understanding to the matter of revelation, on which a true interpretation depends.

What we object to in Quesnel is the dangerous system, the defective and erroneous principles, or rather want of principles, in his interpretation, whereby his mind, at sea without a rudder or pilot, is tossed hither and thither. Fancy is the staple commodity, not the ornament and appendage. He proceeds continually as the church directs, as the fathers happen to dictate, as his imagination suggests; and not as the real import of the passage before him requires.

The consequence is, the errors in doctrine which we have been pointing out. Against this whole system we enter our solemn protest. In the case of Quesnel, the evils were neutralized by the high guidance of spiritual affections, and the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit. But the evils are not the less real in themselves. If a sound system of interpretation be once relinquished, all is thrown into uncertainty, the Scriptures may be made to prove any thing, and the very first end of a Divine Revelation may be defeated. But we propose to notice very briefly—

III. The plan on which this translated edition has been conducted. And here we hasten to relieve the reader from a great source of anxiety. He would naturally ask how he could safely intrust a work debased with such gross and dangerous errors to the hands of minis-

ters, or, in fact, how he could venture to read such a book himself? We inform him, then, that THESE ERRORS ARE ALL OMITTED IN THE PRESENT EDITION. Every one of the passages alluded to above is left out in this translation. We referred to them in order to give the true view of our author's character, and to show what errors may possibly exist with a very high measure of the divine grace.

The edition we now republish is from the pen of a Protestant English clergyman, the Rev. Richard Russell, who carefully left out the passages of a Roman Catholic character, and printed, in an appendix to the last volume, the omitted words and sentences.* These do not fill more than twenty, out of seventeen hundred pages (for such is about the proportion) of which the work consists, and which of course are uninfected with these gross and lamentable corruptions.

The translation was made about a century since; but we have not been able to learn any thing important concerning the author of it. He prefixes to his work the one hundred and one propositions which the court of Rome condemned; he intimates, that in his day there were many among Protestants more in the dark, as to the doctrines of the grace of God in salvation, than Quesnel and other divines of the Roman Catholic church; and, alas! the case is, we fear, the same now.

And this is one principal motive for the republication. We have no work of the same kind; we have nothing in practical divinity so sweet, so spiritual, so interior as to the real life of grace, so rich, so copious, so original. We have nothing that treats the whole New Testament as the manual of the minister of religion. We have nothing that extols the grace of God, and abases and lowers man so entirely. We lessen not the value of our various admirable comments on the New Testament: they have each their particular excellencies. But none of them supersedes Quesnel; none can supply that thorough insight into the world, the evil of sin, the life of faith and prayer, which he possesses.

And this is what we want in the present day. We have learned comments enough; we have light, and doctrine, and systems of divinity enough. But devotional feelings, communion with God, the life of grace, the separation of heart from the vanities of the world,—this is what we need.

And we doubt whether all the gross errors and defects of Quesnel are so injurious to the mind of a young Protestant student, as those plausible comments which sap the foundations of grace and truth; which elevate the natural power of man; which place justification on the footing of human works, conjointly with the obedience and death of Christ;

* Many other erroneous or ambiguous expressions have been omitted in this edition, which Mr. Russell had overlooked.

which explain away most of the passages concerning the new and divine birth of the soul; which weaken or deny the experience of religion in the heart; which teach conformity to the world, and insist not on the life of faith and grace.

Here, however, we may be mistaken. But we conceive we are in danger of no mistake in warmly recommending Quesnel for the particular purposes for which his work is designed. We would place him with Calvin, and Hall, and Henry, and Doddridge, and Guyse, and Scott. We would place him far above another series of commentators, whom it would be invidious to name. At the same time, more caution is necessary in reading Quesnel than in reading many other authors. We would not put him into the hands of young and inexperienced Christians, whose principles are not fixed, and who want the first "sincere milk of the word." After all the omissions made in our edition, the defective theology of our author could not, of course, be changed; the confusion in his own mind could not be wholly cleared up; the integrity of the work could not be violated; the occasional tinge of error could not be obliterated.

The doctrine of justification by faith only, if thoroughly known, will be a barrier against most of these evils. The operations of grace, not only by the sacraments, but in all the other means of instruction, and especially by the meditation of the Holy Scriptures, if duly apprehended, will protect the heart against many remaining errors of this work.

The defective system of interpretation will require more care, because it is seductive to an ardent imagination: it pleases, it opens new and attractive views of reflection. Let the young minister be on his guard. Let him admire, without imitating, the fancies and ingenious turns of our author. Let him use them for devotion and prayer, not for a model of composition or a rule of interpretation. Let him advise with them, select from them, exercise a choice and discretion in his handling of them; not indiscriminately follow their guidance.

We have only to add, that this translation is made from the last and more complete edition of the original work. A translation of the "Reflections on the Gospels" was published at Bath, in 1791, which is materially defective. It leaves out, under the pretence of avoiding the Roman Catholic errors, almost all the spirituality and beauty of the work; and gives no just apprehension of the real sentiments of Quesnel. Not so our edition, which, passing over only the decidedly erroneous passages, leaves the whole spirit of the work unimpaired, and allows the reader to judge of the doctrinal, and practical, and experimental views of the pious author.

D. W.

Islington, June, 1830.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

It is not necessary to detain the reader long at the entrance of this work, in order to inform him wherein it consists. The title alone is sufficient to show the design and nature of it. It is now twenty years ago since the first part of it was published; and the end proposed in doing it, was to invite those to the frequent reading of the gospel, who, to excuse themselves from reading and meditating upon it, complain of their incapacity to make useful reflections upon the wonders of our blessed Saviour's life, and of the barrenness they find in themselves, when they apply their minds to meditate upon this divine book. It was thought that some at least might be cured of that disrelish which is so dishonourable to the word of God, if they were but a little assisted to enter into the spirit of his Son's mysteries, and a way were opened to the great truths which are contained in the words and actions of our divine master.

The specimen which was then published met with greater success than we could have presumed to hope; and that having raised a desire after those Reflections which we published four years ago, upon the other parts of the New Testament, even these have since occasioned many still to wish that our Reflections on the Gospels might be enlarged, which they are in this last edition.

This is sufficient as to what concerns these Reflections themselves. But without doubt there are many who would not be fully satisfied, if nothing were said by way of preface concerning the book itself, which is the subject of these Reflections. And though the preface which we have put before the Acts, and the other writings of the apostles, do not absolutely oblige us to put one likewise before the Gospels, yet those who, perhaps, never had an opportunity of informing themselves concerning the excellency of this sacred book, would have some cause to complain, if we did not here say something which

might show the nature and value thereof; that so the respect and esteem which they will conceive for it by this means, may excite in them a desire of instruction from it by their own endeavours, and cause them to make the reading of the Gospels one of their most common and ordinary employments. To such persons, therefore, that which follows is addressed:

One could not but have a very great idea of this book, were it only to be said of it, that it is the history of the life, actions, and sufferings of the Saviour of the world, and the foundation of the Christian religion, which he came to establish upon earth. But it may justly be added, that the book of the Gospels is properly the book of Christians, the book of the children of God; that it is by means thereof that they know their divine adoption, and their new birth in Jesus Christ; that therein they discover the rights and prerogatives of this heavenly birth, and learn the holiness and the duties of it; and that therein they ought to study those laws and maxims by which they are obliged to frame their manners and to regulate their lives, that they may not be altogether unworthy of that august dignity, to which nothing on earth can be compared.

One may proceed yet farther, and say, that it is the original title, which contains the promise and gift of the inheritance in heaven; that it is the contract of the new covenant between God and man, the divine code, as it were, in which the fundamental laws of the kingdom of God are recorded; or otherwise that it is, as St. Paul expresses it, "The gospel of salvation," which informs us how God predestinated us in Jesus Christ to an immortal life, how he gave us his Son in the incarnation, and how his Son wrought out our salvation upon earth by the mysteries of his life and death; and lastly, how he has anointed, marked, and sealed us with his Holy Spirit, whom he has put into our hearts, in order to imprint his law upon them, by causing us to love and to fulfil it, and that he may continue in them as an earnest and sacred pledge of the glory which is reserved for us in the heavens.

Hence it is easy to infer, that one of the most just and reasonable inclinations of a Christian, who is a child of God and a member of Christ, is that which makes him desirous to read the gospel. One may venture to say, that this is an instinct which is impressed upon him by the Spirit of God, and which would certainly cause him to place his chief delight in this divine book, did not the love of worldly things, and the

violence of his passions, extinguish it in his heart, by fixing it upon sensible objects, which give him a disgust and aversion for those good things which are declared to him in the gospel. Thus we see, that in proportion as the love of the latter is renewed in the heart, our relish for the gospel is proportionably renewed; and that, on the contrary, it is lost more and more the farther we depart from the holiness of Christianity, and the less we live according to the spirit of the divine adoption. Insomuch that we may very justly apply to the children of this world, that which Christ said to the Jews, who boasted that they were the children of God: "He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

And it is not only the inclination of children to be desirous to hear their father, and to be instructed from his mouth; but the instructing of them is a right which God has always conserved to himself in respect of his children, and of which he has shown himself jealous in every age and state of religion; a right this, which devolved, as it were, upon Jesus Christ, as the Son of God by the incarnation, and as the founder and universal priest of the Christian church. "God," says St. Paul, at the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

The apostle, having here a design to enhance the greatness and excellency of the Christian religion by a magnificent encomium, thought he could not begin it by any thing more lofty than this: "That God hath spoken unto us by his Son," and that salvation has been preached to us by the Lord himself. Which is as much as to say, That it was neither by a prophet, nor by Moses, nor by an angel, that God was pleased to treat with us, and to inform us concerning his will; but by his own Son. It is he who is the great prophet of the Christian church, the legislator of the new law, the angel of the eternal covenant, and the teacher of righteousness, who came in person to teach the ways thereof to his church; and that not by speaking to her by private inspirations, confused voices, obscure signs, enigmatical figures, or mysterious dreams, but speaking himself with his own mouth, as a friend speaks to his friend, a brother to a brother, a father to his children, and a master to his disciples.

But to the end that this great benefit and advantage should not be confined only to those who saw him with their eyes, and heard him with their ears, in the days of his flesh, God was pleased to find out a way to render present to us both the incarnate person of his Son, in a spiritual manner, with all the mysteries of his life and death, and likewise his divine instructions: his person and adorable body (spiritually set forth) in the sacrament of the eucharist; his life and his words in the sacrament of the holy Gospels, if I may be permitted to use that expression. And why may I not use it, taking the word *sacrament*, in general, for the sign and conveyance of some sacred thing; since nothing is more sacred, and more conducive to salvation, than that which God has deposited and concealed under the visible sign of the evangelical word; and since the holy fathers have made no difficulty to compare these two celestial gifts, which God has bestowed upon his church, one with the other?

The incomparable author of the book of the "Imitation of Jesus Christ," a person so well versed in the knowledge of salvation, cannot forbear openly declaring the holy passion of his heart toward these two objects. "I perceive," says that holy person, "that there are two things so absolutely necessary for me, that without them this miserable life would be altogether insupportable to me. Shut up as I am in the prison of this body, I cannot but stand in need of food and light. Thou givest me, Lord, thy sacred flesh for the nourishment of my soul; and thy word, to be a lantern unto my feet and a light unto my paths. Should these two things be wanting, I could not possibly live: for thy word is the light of my soul; and thy sacrament, the bread of life."

We shall find no difficulty to fall in with the sentiments of this excellent master of Christian piety, if we consider, that the gospel contains the knowledge of our blessed Saviour and of salvation. But since neither the one nor the other can be fully known, unless we first have some knowledge concerning the corrupt man, and his corruption by means of sin, it may justly be said, that the gospel is a lively representation of those two men, in whom all mankind are included, according to the doctrine of St. Augustine: "All mankind are reducible to two men, the first and the second. All those who are descended from the first, are a part of the first; and all those who are regenerated in the second, belong to the second." "In the case of these two men, the whole Christian faith is

properly comprehended," says the same saint in another place; "of these two men, by one of whom we were sold to be slaves to sin, and by the other of whom we are redeemed from the slavery thereof. By the one we were precipitated into death, by the other we are delivered and made partakers of life; for the former destroyed us in himself, by doing his own will, not that of Him who created him; but the latter has saved us in himself by doing not his own, but the will of Him who sent him."

These two men then are those whom we ought to study in the gospel: the God-man, who humbled himself for our sakes, the grand object of our faith, our trust, and our love; and the sinful man, whom we carry within ourselves, and who ought to be the subject of our shame, our fear, and our hatred, as being the heir of the iniquity and the pride of Adam.

We cannot open the gospel without casting our eyes upon the delineation of this man of sin, who is the source of all those acts of disobedience which we commit against the law of God. We therein behold two sorts of representations of him, both very lively and visible: the one enigmatical and figurative, the other plain and natural. And since a child of Adam, who intends to dedicate himself to God, ought to begin by knowing himself to be such, and by seriously considering all the vices and all the inclinations to sin which have defaced the image of God in him; he cannot better attain to this knowledge than by contemplating himself in these two different representations.

The first of these, which is figurative, we have in those many different diseases and infirmities, over which Christ vouchsafed to exercise his mercy and his power, in curing those who were afflicted with them. For the holy fathers inform us, that our blessed Saviour conferred his benefits in such a manner upon the sick whom he healed, upon the dead whom he raised, and upon the possessed whom he set free from the devil, that at the same time that by those wonderful effects of his sovereign power he gave evident proofs of his divinity, he likewise plainly showed sinners the different wounds their souls had received by the sin of Adam; the death both of the body and the soul, which is the punishment of that sin, and the deplorable bondage in which we are all born under the dominion of Satan. The power which our blessed Saviour exercised over the bodies of men, was no more than a preceding figure of that power which he was come

to exercise over our souls, by delivering them from the death of sin, and from the tyranny of the devil.

Whoever, therefore, in reading the gospel, is desirous to consider and know what it is we call the old man, man corrupted, a child of Adam, a sinner fallen from that happy state in which he was created; or in other words, whoever is desirous to know himself, he will find his own character in the differently diseased persons mentioned in the gospel. He will behold in the man born blind, and in all those other blind persons there recorded, the blindness and ignorance, with respect to God and our duties, in which we are born; in the paralytic, that inability as to all good into which sin has cast us; in the burning fever of St. Peter's wife's mother, the heat of concupiscence which inflames our hearts; in the woman with the bloody issue, the habit of carnal vices; in the deaf and dumb person, the deafness of the heart toward God, and its utter incapacity to confess its own miseries, and to praise its Creator; in the dropsical person, avarice and the eager desire of false riches, the abundance of which does but increase the thirst after them, and cause that swelling of the heart which is the vice of the rich; and so of the rest.

But the second portraiture of the old man, namely, of the vices and corrupt inclinations, which, unless the grace of Christ prevent us very powerfully, do continually reign in our heart, is that which we see in the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees, in whom the corruption of man's heart appears in its proper nature and in all its violence. We cannot avoid being filled with indignation against them, when we behold their pride, envy, jealousy, avarice, hypocrisy, and vanity; their implacable hatred against him who showed their vices to the world; their blindness and hardness of heart at the sight of our blessed Saviour's miracles; their fondness for superstition; their attempts to make the law of God of none effect; their inhumanity and rage against all those who opposed their designs; and, in a word, all the other vices, and all the corruption which those whited sepulchres concealed under an external show of religion, and an affected exactness in observing some certain customs of the law, and all the false traditions they had superadded to it. But while we abhor the manners of the Pharisees, let us take great care that we do not unreasonably flatter ourselves, as if we did not at all resemble them, at least in some respect. We have all within us the principle from which all these vices proceed. And if

they do not appear in our outward actions, it is perhaps because we have other vices, from which the Pharisees were altogether free. In short, if we have not their inclinations in the very same degree of malice and corruption, we have at least enough of them to endanger our salvation; and perhaps there is scarce any person in the world who is not a Pharisee in some respect, and who has not reason to apprehend that some degree of the leaven of those hypocrites lies latent in his heart. "Wo, wo to us," says St. Jerome, "who inherit the vices of the Pharisees!" How hideous therefore soever the representation which the gospel gives us of them may appear, yet all persons may reap some advantage from it, and every one ought to take that admonition of our blessed Saviour as directed to himself: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees."

Now, as to the portraiture of the second man, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, the head and pattern of Christians, it is that which all who are honoured with this glorious title ought to study with that care and application which are worthy of him, whose name they actually do, and whose image and resemblance they ought to bear. And in what place of the gospel will they not find him delineated; since the gospel is nothing else but Jesus Christ himself, still living and breathing in his word, still doing the works of his divine omnipotence, and suffering whatever human infirmity can suffer—still teaching on earth the truths of heaven, and forming for that blessed place the church of the elect which sojourns here on earth? Upon which account, St. Augustine scruples not to say, "That we ought to hear the gospel, as if it were our Lord himself still present; and not to say, 'Oh, how happy were they who saw him with their eyes here on earth!' For many of those that saw him, put him to death; and many of those who never saw him, have believed on him."

Nay, we even seem to have a very great advantage above the former. They saw indeed Jesus Christ; they were witnesses of the wonders which he wrought in all places, and of the good which he did to all persons; they heard the truths which proceeded out of his divine mouth, and which he delivered with that force and energy which is peculiar to God alone. But what a counterbalance to all this did they find in the infirmity of his flesh, in his common and ordinary way of life, in the ignominies and humiliations to which he subjected himself; the scandal whereof, followed by that of the cross, was not yet removed by the glory of his resurrection,

and by all the wonderful works which confirmed the truth of it in the succeeding ages! But we who now receive this gospel of Jesus Christ, sealed with the blood of Christ himself, confirmed by his resurrection and his glorious ascension, by the mission and visible operations of his Spirit, by the accomplishment of the prophecies and the promises, by the faith of all nations, and by the blood of all the martyrs, who in all parts of the world joyfully laid down their lives for the truth of this divine book: let us, I say, to whom the gospel has been given with all these advantageous circumstances, instead of vainly and unjustly repining at our not having heard it from the mouth of our blessed Saviour, offer up our praises unto him, for that through his favour we were born in an age, wherein it is as great and real a folly not to receive this gospel as the word of God, as it seemed to the eyes of the Gentiles and infidels to be folly to receive it as something divine and as the instrument of salvation.

Let us receive it, then, with reverence and gratitude; let us read it with affection and devotion; let us place our delight in it, and make all that pious use of it which we ought to make of a book written by Jesus Christ. For he it is, let us not make the least doubt of it, who is the true author thereof; and, therefore, let us be very far from entertaining the dangerous and visionary conceits of some certain writers, who have dared to advance this notion: That it is not necessary that an historical book, such as the gospel is, should have been inspired by the Holy Ghost, in order to make it divine and canonical. But let us rather say, with St. Augustine, That "when the apostles and disciples of our blessed Saviour committed to writing what he did and taught, we must by no means say that it was not he who wrote it; since they were his members who composed the whole, without inserting any thing but what their Head himself revealed and dictated to them. For whatever he intended we should read relating to his words and actions, he caused them to write it, as it were, with his own hands."

What comfort and consolation is it to our faith, to have so immovable a foundation as this! What joy to our hope, to be no less assured of the truth and certainty of the promises made in the gospel, than if the incarnate Truth himself delivered them to us now with his own mouth! What assistance is it to our charity, to be assured that we shall find in this adorable book the Mediator, without whom we cannot possibly

be reconciled to God; the Way, without which we cannot go to him; the Guide, who alone can conduct us in it; the Victim, in whose blood we must be washed; the High-priest, ever living, ever present, and ever making intercession for us before the face of God; the Master, whom we ought to hear; the Model, by which we are to frame our lives; the Pattern of all the virtues which should render us conformable to our head; and, in a word, that adorable Head himself, as the principle of life, of faith, and of the spirit of grace in his members, and as the sovereign judge of the quick and of the dead!

But if we desire earnestly to study the righteousness and the life of faith, which is the life of Christians, we must do it with the respect, docility, caution, humility, submission, and simplicity of faith; far from bringing along with us the presumption, pride, boldness, and that spirit of self-sufficiency and independency which heresy insensibly conveys into all those whom she has seduced.

For nothing is more true than that which St. Augustine says in his eighteenth Treatise upon the Gospel of St. John, where he instructs his people how they ought to hear and read the gospel. "Heresies," says he, "and pernicious doctrines, which insnare souls, and cast them into the abyss of hell, have sprung from no other cause but this, from men interpreting the Scriptures, which are good in themselves, in a bad sense, and then maintaining and defending that sense with all the rashness and confidence imaginable." But in order to preserve the most unlearned from this misfortune, especially in reading the Gospel of St. John, which is the most sublime of all, this holy doctor gives them a rule, which he calls "A rule proper to keep them sound in the faith;" by the help of which they may, without any danger, feed upon the bread of the divine word. "It is absolutely necessary, my dear brethren," says he, "that we read or hear those things which are above our capacity, with abundance of precaution, with a heart full of piety and devotion, and, as it is written, with fear and trembling: observing still this rule of a pure and sound faith, That we should joyfully feed upon those truths which we are able to understand, but as to those which surpass our understanding, let us defer our endeavours to understand them till another time, but let us not defer one moment giving our assent to them without the least doubt; that is, though we

may meet with something which is beyond our reach, let us notwithstanding be fully persuaded that it contains nothing but what is good and true."

Nothing can be more prudent and just than this advice; but at the same time nothing is more humbling and more capable of confounding the pride of those vain and presumptuous persons, who think they can of themselves understand every thing, and who flatter themselves that they have always the spirit of understanding so as to penetrate into the sense of the most difficult places; nothing, I say, is more capable of covering them with shame and confusion, than that account which this great saint gives us afterward of his own disposition. For this sublime and penetrating genius ranks himself with children and disciples, and is not in the least ashamed to confess his own ignorance, and the need he has to have recourse to the light of heaven, in order to attain to a true understanding of the Scriptures. "Consider a little, my brethren," says he to his people, "who I am that I should undertake to discourse to you upon the gospel, and of what nature the truths are which I have taken upon me to explain; the truths are altogether divine, and I am only a man; they are spiritual mysteries, and I am carnal; they are the secrets of eternity, and I live in a body subject to mortality. Far be from me, my dear brethren, all vain presumption, if I desire to preserve the health of my soul in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. I myself receive according to my small capacity that which I set before you: when truth vouchsafes to open to me, I feed upon it together with you; when it shuts itself up from me, I knock with you at the gate thereof."

Another disposition in order to read the gospel with profit, as we may also infer from the words of St. Paul, is a great esteem and reverence even for things which appear mean and little to the eyes of the flesh. Those who behold them with the eyes of faith, while they therein contemplate the righteousness and the life of faith, say with St. Paul, that they are "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." St. Paul, in saying that it is "the power of God," does in this one expression comprehend every thing great and magnificent which can be spoken to the advantage of this divine book. For his meaning is, that if we consider the eternal truths therein

declared, it is God who speaks therein, it is God also of whom he speaks, and he speaks as God; because at one and the same time he therein speaks both in such a manner as is suitable to his greatness and infinite majesty, and to the depth of the mysteries he reveals, and likewise in such a manner as is adapted to the meanness of those whom he instructs, and to the different capacity of those who read these heavenly oracles. If we consider in them the past matters of fact which are there recorded, what can we find in all the histories extant which does at all come near this? A God who is born in a stable, and who dies upon a cross; who is at once both God and man; whose whole life is but one continued series of miracles which could be the effect of nothing but a divine power; and whose humiliations, sufferings, and death appeared more powerful and miraculous than his miracles themselves: these having almost generally only hardened those who had the greatest reputation for wisdom and sanctity among his people, whereas the former converted even his enemies and executioners.

As to those future things which are there foretold by this God-man, nothing was ever at one and the same time so credible and incredible. The destruction of that temple, that city, and that people, which God had established by so many wonders, and by the subversion of so many nations; the raising up of another people who were to fill the whole earth, after they had been formed into a body by twelve fishermen in the midst of persecutions, and of a deluge of blood, and in opposition to all the powers of the earth. These wonders already come to pass were so visible, that they afford us a full security as to that which remains still to be fulfilled, namely, the universal judgment which a crucified God shall pass upon all mankind, at the end of the world, in the sight of heaven and earth, and the consummation of the church of the saints in the glory of eternity, where all the magnificent promises made to the elect, throughout the whole Scripture, shall be fully and perfectly accomplished.

In fine, the means which we there plainly see were chosen by Christ, to the forming of these great designs, the manner of life, and the laws he prescribes to those who are to compose this new people, and the rules of the Christian morality which he there teaches, are so worthy of admiration, that, at the same time that human wisdom is confounded and pride humbled, we cannot but adore the treasures of the wisdom and know-

ledge of God which lie hid therein, and are constrained to cry out, that the finger of God is there, that the gospel is truly "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

But it is not "the power of God unto salvation," except only when the finger of God, that is, his Spirit, vouchsafes to write in our hearts the faith or belief of the eternal truths and mysteries of Christ, the hope of the accomplishment of the promises, and of the good things to come, and charity, or the love of his law, his precepts, and his evangelical maxims. For without this quickening Spirit, the letter, even of the gospel, is a letter which killeth; and this savour of life is, by our abuse of it, changed into a savour of death. From whence it is easy to infer, that in order to read it with advantage, it is necessary to join to this holy exercise such fervent prayer as may draw down upon us his Spirit and his benediction. Our own sanctification, as well as the sanctity of his word, requires that our reading should have more in it of adoration than of study. And since even the food of our body ought to be received with prayer and thanksgiving, how much more ought this spiritual food to be so, which is not at all beneficial to the soul, but only so far as the heart is open to receive it, and the eternal truth speaks to the heart?

But the best preparation for the reading of the gospel as we ought, is to love it; and we cannot possibly love and relish it, unless the love of eternal treasures reign in our heart, or, at least, begin to gain ground therein, by a desire to devote ourselves to the service of God, and a purpose and resolution to seek his kingdom and the righteousness thereof. The understanding of the truths of the gospel is the fruit of the purity of our manners. Our lives must be conformable to the gospel, if we desire to attain to the knowledge of the secrets, of the mysteries, and of the holiness of the evangelical perfection. We must disengage our minds from the love of carnal and perishing things, and we must love those which are heavenly and eternal, to qualify us to take delight in a book, the whole design whereof is, to destroy the former sort of love, and to establish the latter upon the ruins thereof. For it is called by Jesus Christ, "the gospel," or, "the gospel of the kingdom," as St. Matthew has it; "the gospel of the grace of God," by the apostle of grace; "the gospel of the glory of Christ," and "the gospel of peace," by the same apostle in other places. And it is called by these appellations on no

other account, but because it declares to us the accomplishment of the spiritual promises, and informs us that Jesus Christ, the high-priest of good things to come, appeared at last in the world, to impart to us his grace and his Spirit, thereby to conduct us in his ways to our heavenly country, and there put us into the possession and enjoyment of those good things in the bosom of God which are reserved for his elect.

Not that the gospel may not and ought not to be read even by those whose lives are irregular and disorderly. On the contrary, such are to be invited to seek after remedies in this holy book for their blindness and concupiscence. And who can tell but that it is the design of God to make use of some of these words to open their eyes, and to convert them to himself, as he heretofore touched the heart of St. Anthony, and changed it in a moment, by one word of the gospel, which he heard as he entered into the church; and as he converted St. Augustine by one single sentence of St. Paul? We must, therefore, if possible, prevail with them to read the gospel; but, at the same time, "we must," as St. Augustine says, "take from them, as from children, those childish amusements with which their minds are so foolishly employed, that we may substitute in their stead things more useful, as being for persons grown up to full age." And that they may raise themselves from the earth on which we see them grovelling, we must speak to them in the words of the same saint: "Rise, seek; pour forth sighs and ardent desires, and knock at the gate which you find shut against you."

Let us then purify our hearts by the reading of the gospel, and this reading will still purify them to a greater degree. Let us sanctify our manners by our respect and reverence toward this holy book, and this book will still sanctify us more and more. Let us kindle within us a warm and ardent affection for this word of fire, and this fire will inflame our hearts to such a degree, as to make us cry out with admiration, as did the two disciples, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures!" Let us make those sweets which God has preserved for us in the word of his Son our chief delight; and we shall quickly find, that this delicious word will daily turn all that the world calls delight and diversion into bitterness. In short, we shall find our instruction, our strength, our con-

solation, our counsel, our security and protection in this treasure which God has deposited in the hands of the church, to be distributed by her to her children. In the word of Jesus Christ we shall learn how the heart of Christ is affected toward us, and how that of a Christian ought to be affected toward him; and the divine wisdom, concealed and covered, as it were, under this adorable letter, coming into our hearts, all sorts of good things will come into them along with it.

"The bare sight of the gospel," says St. Chrysostom, "is sufficient to induce us to regulate our thoughts and desires, and to give us a disgust toward the things of this life. When this sacred book is in any house, it is like an arsenal filled with arms, which keeps it in perfect safety. It removes all the power of hell at a distance, and the devil dares not enter it. Only to cast our eyes upon this book with reverence, is enough sometimes to prevent our falling into sin; it is enough to awaken our conscience, and to raise in us a salutary shame on the account of those sins into which we have been so unfortunate as to fall. But if to this we join a careful and diligent reading, the soul will find itself, as it were, in a divine sanctuary, and become more pure and perfect, by means of the conversation it has with God in reading his holy word."

Neither is this only a sanctuary; it is, according to St. Augustine, a heaven, where God clearly manifests to us the wonders of his grace, the riches of his mercy, and the adorable designs of his wisdom and his power.

Let us enter then with confidence into this sanctuary, consecrated by the blood of our blessed Saviour. Let us raise ourselves, and ascend into this heaven, which his Spirit has framed for us here on earth. Let us open the eyes of our faith, and with reverence, gratitude, and love contemplate the treasures and good things which are the patrimony and inheritance of the children of promise. And let every one of us offer up, with St. Augustine, this prayer, in order to obtain the light and grace necessary to our improvement, by the reading of this book of Jesus Christ:

"Grant us the grace, O my God, to take a clear and distinct view of this heaven which is the work of thy hands. Dispel those mists from before our eyes which hide it from them. It is in these divine books that those oracles are contained, by which thou dost communicate wisdom to the humble. Exalt thy glory to its utmost height, by the mouth of those

who speak to us in these books, and whom we may style babes from the simplicity of their language. For we know no other books capable, like these, to destroy pride, and to overthrow thy enemies, namely, those who would fain excuse themselves in their sins, and who thereby only more obstruct their reconciliation with thee. No, my God, I know none comparable to these holy books. They are these which have made me bow my neck to thy yoke, which have prevailed upon me to confess my miseries to thee, and which have taught me to serve thee with a free and voluntary worship. Cause me then to understand them, O Father of mercies; and let that gracious favour be the reward of the submission which I pay them. For thou hast established their authority upon so firm a foundation, only for the sake of those who should submit themselves thereto."

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

THE

GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST,

ACCORDING TO

ST. MATTHEW.

CHAPTER I.

SECT. I.—THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST.

1. The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

The gospel is the history of the foundation of the kingdom of God, which is the church; formed by the vocation and union of the Jews, (David,) and Gentiles, (Abraham,) in one and the same faith. It is the relation of the sojourning life of Jesus Christ, the founder of this church, prefigured by the life of Abraham; and of his conquests, prefigured by those of David. It is the covenant of the adoption of the children of the promise made to those two great saints. What consolation is it, to find here, at first sight, the two titles by which we belong to thee, O Jesus! The first is the choice and eternal adoption of thy Father, who becomes ours. And the second is thy grace and Spirit, (the worthy fruit of all thy labours and conflicts,) which make us thy members. Grant that, in this quality, we may become true penitents, like David, and true worshippers of God, in the spirit of faith, like Abraham!

2. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren: 3. And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; 4. And

Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; 5. And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; 6. And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias.

This genealogy of the Son of God is an abridgment of the faith of his incarnation. It informs us that he is true man, by the generations which it contains; that he is a Saviour, by the name of Jesus, which it gives him; that he is both priest and prophet, by the title of Christ, which in him signifies *anointed* with the Holy Ghost, and with the Divinity itself; that he is the prince and the author of peace, as son of David; author of the faith, father of them who believe, and model of the most perfect self-denial, and of the true circumcision, as son of Abraham; born miraculously, and in virtue of the promise, the immortal sacrifice of the living God, and heir of the promises, as son of Isaac; and lastly, the eldest among his brethren, through free predestination, persecuted by his carnal brethren, and head of the church, which is the Israel of God, as son of Jacob.

7. And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; 8. And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; 9. And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; 10. And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; 11. And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon: 12. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; 13. And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; 14. And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud.

The true nobility of these kings, and of all the ancestors of Jesus Christ, is to have their names found in his genealogy, and to have a share in his birth; that of Christians, is to be born of and in Jesus Christ himself. Men are apt to be fond and to boast of an illustrious birth, which yet, perhaps, in the sight of God, has been more criminal than a meaner; but they never employ their thoughts upon a holy birth, which renders us children of God and members of his Son. Greatness, power, and human wisdom appear in the family of the

ancestors of the Son of God incarnate; but he will not enter into it himself, till all those are first gone out.

15. And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; 16. And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

The parents of Jesus, and Jesus himself, draw no manner of advantage from the power, splendour, or riches of their ancestors, except only the joy they conceive to see themselves reduced to a low estate, that they may be subservient to the designs of God in the temporal, poor, and humble birth of his Son; and that, by their mean condition, they may represent his humiliation in the flesh, and the concealment of his eternal glories from the eyes of men. O my Saviour, how dost thou confound the pride and vanity of men, in relation to their genealogies, by having thy own composed of a long train of sinners!

17. So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon *are* fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ *are* fourteen generations.

The various states and conditions through which the people of God passed, made it evident that none of all these was THAT which had been promised; and that in Jesus Christ alone the promises were to be accomplished, by the establishment of a state of royalty and an unchangeable covenant. Nothing was able to hinder the execution of this design; neither the age of Abraham, nor the barrenness of Sarah, nor the slavery of their posterity in Egypt, nor their infidelity in the wilderness, and before the time of the kings; nor the sins of David, and those of the kings, his descendants and successors; nor the captivity and desolation of this people, after the declining of their regal government.

SECT. II.—JOSEPH ENCOURAGED CONCERNING THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

18. ¶ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

The incarnation is the effect of the love of God toward

mankind, and therefore it is appropriated to the Holy Ghost, who is the substantial and consubstantial love of the Father and the Son. It is by the same Spirit, that both Jesus Christ as head, and the faithful as his members, are conceived; he, as Son, by nature, we, as his brethren, by adoption. O God, how much does it imply to be a Christian! and how great ought his piety and holiness to be!

19. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

True charity can easily find the middle between jealousy and insensibility. It is never contrary to prudence. The just person knows how to secure his own reputation, without blemishing another's, by discovering his faults. A passion too credulous, and a false zeal for the law, are often the occasion of violating it, by hindering men from taking notice of any thing but the revenge which it permits, and of all which is severe and rigorous in it. But a wise patience and true justice in Joseph, render him attentive to the mild and indulgent part of the law, which did not at all oblige him to become the accuser of his spouse. This wise patience is a very great gift both in a husband and in a wife.

20. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

How good is it to suffer in silence, like the holy virgin! God never abandons those who, according to her example, commit themselves to him. He will send an angel from heaven, rather than leave those finally in trouble who, in imitation of Joseph, conserve charity, and place their confidence in him. The knowledge of hidden truths and mysteries is the reward of calmness and patience under inward troubles. The angel awakes the remembrance of the promises in Joseph, by calling him the son of him to whom they had been made; and thereby prepares him for the belief of their accomplishment in his spouse. The first birth or conception of Christ, is not a communication of the substance of the Holy Ghost, but an effect of his power. This was a double consolation

to Joseph, to be at the same time assured both of the fidelity of his spouse, and of the holiness of the infant which she carried in her womb. This is the recompense of his mildness and good nature.

21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

These words declare the second birth of Christ from the womb of the virgin, and how the faithfulness of Joseph was rewarded. Nothing so proper to Jesus as *to save*, in destroying sin by his grace. Would to God, that every one would as fully answer his name of Christian, of pastor, of magistrate, of father, of priest, as Jesus Christ does that of Saviour! O amiable and reviving Name! What confidence dost thou inspire into true penitents! What fidelity, gratitude, and love into Christians!

22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Jesus is the completion of the prophecies. "All the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily" in him; and through him, both with and in us. Thou art verily and indeed with us, Lord, by thy incarnation; vouchsafe likewise to be with us by the impression and lively sense of thy presence, by the belief and imitation of thy mysteries, and by the powerful operation of thy Spirit, thy grace, and thy love.

24. Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

How acceptable a sacrifice to God, is a ready, humble, and exact obedience! This gives certain relief and comfort under inward pains and troubles. In many such cases, the more one considers, the more one is perplexed; the secret to find true peace of mind, is to suffer one's self to be guided. A man who really loves God, as soon as ever he knows his will, will immediately perform it, without knowing the particular reasons of it.

25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Mary is, in one sense, the mother of Christ entire, as he

consists both of head and members; and Jesus is the "first-born among many brethren." Oh, happy moment of our blessed Saviour's birth, be thou always present to our mind, be thou always the delight of our heart! That which it had been our duty to have done at the foot of the manger, let us do now by adoration, thanksgiving, love, imitation, and humility. Oh, grant us a true respect for this holy name, an ardent love for our Saviour, and a hearty zeal for our own salvation!

CHAPTER II.

SECT. I.—ADORATION OF CHRIST BY THE WISE MEN.

1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

The love of Jesus for a mean and private life, appears from the first moment of his birth, in the choice which he makes of Bethlehem. Those who are nearest to Christ very often know him not, when those who were farther off, seek, adore, and serve him. How great was the faith of these wise men, and how much elevated above human reasonings and the opinions of the world!

2. Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Jesus Christ is king by birth, and from that very time demands our homage and allegiance. This courageous and undissembled faith of the wise men is a very great example. The obedience and simplicity of true Christians sometimes hinder them from seeing the hazards which they run in following the voice of God; but he watches over them. He protects those who think of nothing but performing their duty, without perplexing themselves about the consequences of it. The star of Jesus, with respect to us, is his word. Let us never lose sight of this, if we intend to be his true worshippers.

3. When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Christ is the peace of the righteous, and the trouble of the

wicked. A man is well received by the world, when he comes to flatter it, and to comply with its passions; but if he comes to interrupt, to oppose, and to condemn them, what storms, what tempests does he raise! It is difficult not to follow the example of the great, and to secure ourselves from the influence of their authority and their passions; and therefore they are the more obliged to regulate their conduct.

4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

Adorable conduct of God, to permit this search and study of the Scriptures, for the hardening of Herod, the condemnation of the priests, the warning of the faithful, and the instruction of the wise men and the Gentiles! It is the Scripture which ought to regulate and justify all extraordinary lights and ways.

5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

It is a very dreadful state and condition, for priests and pastors to have the knowledge of the Scriptures, and not to profit by them; to show Jesus Christ to others, and not to follow him themselves; to point out the way of salvation, and not to walk in it. That which leads others to God has no influence at all upon the heart of those who have the spirit of the world.

6. And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Happy the country, but more happy the heart, in which Christ is born! One city alone had this privilege; but every soul may have it.

7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

God laughs at the wisdom of men. He often deceives the wicked by their own artifices, and hinders them from taking advantage of the sincerity and simplicity of the righteous. The Scripture is our star; too often men study it with a corrupt intention. They plunge into barren disquisitions of chronology and the like; but do not at all examine into the

spirit of it; they inform themselves exactly concerning the time of the star, but will not follow the direction of it.

8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

The ambitious are generally hypocrites, and make religion subservient to their interest and policy. Let us take care not to deceive ourselves, in thinking that we seek to know the mysteries of religion with no other design but to adore them; the secrets of the Scriptures, only in order to love God the more; and his ways, for no other end but to walk in them. How often are men mistaken!

9. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

God sometimes withdraws from his saints all extraordinary illuminations, because they should not depend too much upon them. He brings them back, and confines them to the way of faith, that they may the more esteem and value it, in themselves and others. But whenever there is occasion, he restores those illuminations to such as sincerely seek him. All our knowledge ought to tend toward Christ, and to stop at him. All such as cannot help us to attain to his kingdom is but vanity.

10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Comfort taken away, and restored to the righteous, becomes more dear unto them, and augments their joy. In following the word of God, one may infallibly find out Jesus Christ. It is not upon the account of light in itself that we should so much rejoice; but because it makes us know Christ, and leads us unto him.

11. ¶ And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

Let us learn of these first Christians to humble ourselves, to adore Jesus Christ, and to give up ourselves entirely to him, as soon as we have found him. What faith was here, to worship a poor neglected infant as a God! And what power

in this Infant, to bestow such a faith as this, so pure, so humble, so courageous, and so destitute of all human support! To open one's heart is to open one's treasure; it is Christ who fills it; it is to him that it must be opened. Happy the man, who always finds therein the gold of charity, the incense of prayer, and the myrrh of mortification! The more careful a man is to present and offer these to God, the more of these does he continually receive again from him.

12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Let us, like these wise men, be obedient to inspirations; and like them, take the contrary course from the world. Fleshly wisdom and ambition find themselves at length confounded. It is one of the first lessons given to the first Christians, that they must obey God rather than man. We can never return to heaven, but by a road different from that which has carried us away from it. It is the greatest of all delusions, to pretend to be converted without changing our lives, and to go to heaven by that way which was leading us to hell.

SECT. II.—THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—THE MURDER OF THE INFANTS.

13. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

The rigour of God's conduct toward his own Son, is the consolation of those whom he obliges to walk through rugged and grievous ways, without showing them their journey's end. He makes his escape by flight, who could have preserved himself by his own power; to teach us, that we must go to God by the lowest ways, that we must be humbled under the reputation and power of his adversaries, to triumph over them with advantage; and that of all our enemies, pride is the most dangerous. The world seeks Christ for no other end but to destroy him. Let my heart, O Jesus! be the Egypt of thy refuge from the persecution of the world! Live

there, reign there, stifle and suppress whatever thou shalt find there of the spirit of Herod.

14. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

A blind obedience is due to God, because he is God, and can neither deceive nor be deceived. Our trust in his wisdom and his love should make us take the cross without arguing or disputing. As soon as ever we know the will of God, nothing should keep us from doing it. It is for man to obey, it is for God to answer for the success of obedience. It is he who sometimes stops and hinders us, when invincible difficulties seem to do it. That man always performs his will, who puts himself in a disposition to perform it. God bestows the means, even when he seems to take them away.

15. And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.

What humiliation was it for Christ to be, as it were, driven from amidst the people of God, and banished by his Father into a country of idolatry and abomination! How many lights extinguished, how many graces hidden! But nothing is lost, when it is lost for God. Thus God sometimes obliges his servants to remain, as it were, buried in a (superstitious and) heretical country, or among wicked people, to worship him in their stead, to gather up those graces which they neglect, or to spread them in a secret manner; or, perhaps, to secure themselves from the ill-will of false brethren.

16. ¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

The ambitious man is cruel, and always ready to sacrifice every thing, even Christ himself, to his passion. The world is more to be feared when it flatters than when it persecutes. It bestows life at that very time when it thinks it takes it away. The disgraces of the world contain in them great graces for those who know how to distinguish and improve them. Salvation, given so freely to these infants, teaches us

that our own must necessarily be the gift of God. Grace prevents all merit in those whose will it disposes, as well as in these infants, who could not possibly will any thing freely.

17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 18. In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Christ makes the cruelty of Herod subservient to the publication of his birth, to the accomplishment of his Father's designs, and to the sanctification of his elect. He reduces, within the order of his goodness, the greatest disorders of human wickedness. We are often inconsiderately afflicted at that which is the real happiness of those we love. To lament the death of infants, is to lament their salvation. It is, for the most part, a great gain to mothers thus to lose their children in their infancy, who might otherwise, perhaps, prove the occasion of their eternal loss and damnation, by reason of the bad education which they might give them, that idolatrous fondness which they might have for them, and the ambition and wicked methods which parents use to advance them in the world. Happy the tears of such mothers, if they make (some) amends for the past, or preserve them from vain joys for the future!

SECT. III.—THE RETURN OUT OF EGYPT.

19. ¶ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

A true child of God adores and imitates the humble dependency of Christ on his Father, whose commands he receives from time to time, not by himself, but by an angel, and by Joseph. Let us learn of him, not to take one step, but either by the command, or in the way of God. As to all common and ordinary duties, his command is sufficiently signified to us by the obligations of our state and condition. To him who is not wanting in relation to those, God will not be wanting on all extraordinary occasions.

20. Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

Thus the designs of God concerning his elect, his church,

and his truth, seem to depend upon human and natural events; whereas, in reality, God disposes and orders these events according to his own designs. God humbles himself, to give a reason for his conduct toward his Son; and he humbles his Son, by making him seem unable to save his life but only like other men. The malice and power of men endure as short a time as their life; God alone, almighty and eternal, is terrible in his anger. To wait quietly and patiently, till either the anger of men, or they themselves pass away, is the most proper means to escape that anger which will never pass away.

21. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

Obedience ought to be ready, persevering, and indefatigable. When God has once placed us, we must not remove ourselves of our own accord, and without knowing his will. Moses leading the people of God out of Egypt into the land of promise, is a figure of Joseph, who brings back the Son of God from thence; and Joseph represents the pastors, who conduct the church and her children by the mission and the word of God. How happy is a church, whose pastor being, like Joseph, in the hand of God, takes and carries the faithful in his bosom, as his children, to convey them to heaven, the true land of Israel.

22. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

The joy of this life is always interrupted by sorrow. God is not wont to free his servants from all troubles and afflictions in this world. Here we never want enemies; here is always somewhat to be feared. Christ was conducted step by step by his Father; and as for us, we would fain know immediately all the designs of God concerning us. Let us then, in like manner, with the docility and submission of a child, suffer ourselves to be led and directed, out of obedience, and according to the example of the Word incarnate. He is light itself, and yet acts as if he was not so. We are nothing but darkness, and yet will needs be our own light.

23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Jesus Christ a true Nazarene, that is, holy, separate from all impurity, and consecrated to God. A Christian ought to be such in proportion. Let us learn to conceal ourselves, and to keep silence, until our time to act and to speak is come. If Christ go up to Jerusalem, it is only to worship God according to the law, to carry on the work which he gave him to perform, and to finish his sacrifice. Except on these occasions, he lives private and concealed, retired from the world, and shut up in the solitude of Nazareth: this is the pattern of a priest.

CHAPTER III.

SECT. I.—THE MORTIFIED LIFE AND PREACHING OF ST. JOHN.

1. In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

After a retirement of thirty years, to begin the exercise of his ministry in the wilderness; to prefer the country to the city, the poor to the rich, the ignorant to the learned, is that wherein St. John will have but few imitators. The forwardness and usual aims of preachers are here condemned, in the very beginning of the gospel. This is what hinders the fruit of it.

2. And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Repentance is the true preparation for the kingdom of heaven. Let this therefore keep us every moment prepared for it, because this kingdom is every moment approaching nearer to us. If this kingdom is a kingdom of love, the repentance which prepares us for it must likewise be a repentance of love. It is from thee, O Lord, that we hope to receive both this love and this repentance, both the principle and the works.

3. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Repentance must begin by taking away the stops and hinderances of salvation, that we may proceed directly toward God. It is difficult to hear this voice, except in the wilderness, that is, in retirement, and out of the noise and hurry of worldly affairs; or at least, in a recollected, intent, and sedate mind. The sinner is gone too far from God, to be called back any otherwise than by a great *cry*, that is to say, a great grace. Repentance is not the business of a moment, because it is a preparation for being reconciled with God; nor does this preparation consist only in a few thoughts or words, because the way of God lies in the will; nor is this way easy to be prepared, since by it the heart must pass from darkness to light, and from death to life; nor is all this the work of man, because the preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord, and he only can order and direct his steps, and make him choose and delight in his way.

4. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

He who preaches repentance, ought to perform it himself, and join the outward part to the inward. This persuades more than words. All is singular in St. John, not to attract the esteem and praises of men, but to awaken their attention. A fast so rigid and extraordinary might pass for excessive and indiscreet; but when the finger of God appears, men must hold their peace.

5. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan.

Those who direct to God by a straiter way, are most sought to by such as really desire not to deceive themselves, but to be saved. So true is it, that one does not discourage sinners, and drive them to despair, by preaching to them repentance, according to the holy severity of the divine law.

6. And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

One part of repentance is to bear the shame and confusion of our sins in confessing them. It is not grievous to any to

show this shame and confusion before men, except only to those who have none at all for their sins before God. Sooner or later the sinner must be humbled, because every sinner is proud; but this humiliation has no virtue in it, unless it proceed from the choice or acceptance of the sinner.

SECT. II.—REPROACHES AGAINST THE PHARISEES.

7. ¶ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

A disinterested and impartial preacher or director (of the conscience) spares no one. The holy rigour which he exercises is infinitely better than a false mildness; this only lulls the sinner asleep in his vices; that wakes him, makes him thoroughly sensible of his condition, and shakes his conscience with a saving fear. To treat a sinner harshly, in order to humble him, is not to insult him; it is only piercing the skin with a charitable hand, to take down the swelling of his pride.

8. Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Unhappy he, whose life passes away in promises, desires, and barren designs of repentance! God requires of us real works, and such as are (in some measure) proportioned to our sins. No fruit, except that of charity, is worthy of God, who is charity itself. A fruit of self-love, such as is a servile fear, cannot be (acceptable to) his justice. The exercises of repentance cannot please him, but by the spirit of repentance, which consists of a true change of mind, a sincere grief, and a penitent love.

9. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

The virtue of fathers is of no advantage to children, unless they tread in the same steps. God has no need of us to serve him, because he can make worshippers of the most hardened sinners, can change hearts of stone into tender lovers of his law, and form children out of the most mercenary slaves. Oh that this heart, O Lord, hitherto so hard and servile, may

feel the effects of this sovereign power! Vouchsafe to show thy glory in making me a child of faith and promise.

10. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Let us always look upon death as ready to surprise us. Let us well consider this truth, that to be saved, it is not enough that we do no evil works, but we must do good ones. No works are such except those which God works in men by his grace, and which men return to God by their charity. Damnation consists of two things; the one, eternal excommunication, in being separated from the body of Christ, and from the presence of God, without the least hope of recovery; the other, eternal punishment by fire. Let us fear this punishment; but let us more fear that eternal excommunication.

11. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire:

The greatest saints are nothing before Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost (which Christ alone can give) overflowing the soul, purifies, transforms, and lifts it up to God. The less the minister attributes to himself the work of God in the soul, the more he advances it there. The outward part only belongs to him; but God alone sanctifies, who can work upon the heart, subject it to himself by his Spirit, and make a new heart of it. What should I do, O Lord, if thou didst not wash me often in the laver of thy blood, and purify me in the fire of thy charity?

12. Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The present and visible church is the floor, where the corn is as yet mingled with the chaff, the elect with the reprobate. The agitation of persecution, or the salutary suffering for the truths of the gospel, separate them in this life the one from the other; the fan of the last judgment shall remove them from the floor, in order to be either carried into the garner, or cast into the fire. Terrible, but inevitable separation!

We shall eternally belong either to the one or the other; and out of the floor, we shall be the same that we have been in it, either chaff or wheat. Grant, O Lord, that I may have a heart, not as of chaff, feeble, light, empty, barren, and tossed about with every wind; but as of wheat, pure, full of substantial virtue, firm in goodness, fruitful in good works, and fit to become the bread of God, after having been bruised under the millstone of the cross, kneaded in the water of affliction, and baked with the fire of charity!

SECT. III.—THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST.

13. ¶ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

Jesus clothes himself with us and our sins, that he may clothe us with himself and his righteousness. He takes, and, as it were, deifies in himself the marks, effects, punishment, and remedy of sin. If Christ, being innocence itself, notwithstanding chooses to bear the shame of sin, in passing for a sinner, to subject himself to (a sort of) public penance, and oblige himself by this ceremony to all the duties of a true penitent; let us be ashamed of our pride, injustice, and impenitence.

14. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

How holy and lovely is that contest, which arises, on either side, from nothing but humility! The designs of God are incomprehensible, even to the saints. There is no person but has need of being purified by Christ; let us go to him with confidence every moment, because every moment we have need of his grace. An important lesson this, which God here, at the very first, delivers to us by his apostle; the necessity which we have of a Saviour and of his grace, were we as innocent and as penitent as St. John.

15. And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it to be so* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

The humility of Jesus could not but surmount that of St. John. In the former, it is firm and persevering, without heat or obstinacy; in the latter, obedient and submissive, without

flagging and growing weak. He who is truly humble, lets slip no opportunity of humbling himself without improving it. Those who are to preach this virtue, ought to make it appear in their life and conversation. Christian righteousness is almost all included in humility and repentance; because these include all sorts of good works, at least in the preparation and disposition of the heart. Prepare mine, O Lord! replenish it out of the fulness of thy own!

16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: 17. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Nothing pleases God but in his Son. The baptized [who truly receive Christ] enter into the divine filiation, and are made a part of this beloved Son by the grace of adoption. God bestows no favour, and pardons no sin, but through the merits and for the sake of his Son. The certain way for a man not to be refused, is never to present himself before God in prayer, but together with Jesus Christ; to ask nothing but in his name, to do nothing but by his Spirit, to hope for nothing but through his mediation, and to offer nothing to God but in the union of this Son, and in offering him to the Father.

CHAPTER IV.

SECT. I.—THE FAST AND TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.

1. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

Thus the Holy Ghost received at baptism, inclines the Christian to retirement and a retreat from the world. The more a man is devoted to God, the more ought he to expect temptation. See here an excess of charity and humility in Christ, who exposes himself to the temptation of the devil, that he may overcome for us the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We seek retirement, that we

may shun temptation, and we do well, because we are weak. Jesus goes into the wilderness on purpose to be tempted there, because he goes to overcome for us, clothed in our weakness without, full of his own divine strength within.

2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward ahungered.

Fasting, and all mortification of the flesh, has been undergone, sanctified, taught, and rendered easy by Jesus Christ. The devil makes use of our body to tempt us; we ought to use it to engage, disarm, and vanquish him. He turns the strength and vigour of the body against us; we must, by weakening it, turn it into arms against him. Assist me, Lord, to do this salutary violence to my rebellious flesh. Give me the strength and fidelity which thou has merited for me by thy holy fast, to follow thy example, to obey the church, and to fight against sin in myself.

3. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

The gluttony of Adam is cured by the fasting of Christ. No necessity should induce us to relinquish the methods of God's ordinary providence, since Christ himself does not do it. It is never necessary to desire miracles for the wants of the body: it is oftenmost most expedient not to desire them; and it is always the surest way to leave God to act of himself. We often beg to be delivered from some evil and necessity; and it is by this very means that God designs to show us his mercy and to secure our salvation.

4. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Providence makes use of every thing, and is confined to nothing; God being able to nourish with his word the body as well as the soul. Trust in God, in the greatest necessities, saves abundance of disquiets, temptations, and sins. He who gave us life before we could desire it, can he want either power or will to conserve it, after having loaded us with benefits, and given us his own Son?

5. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

The most holy persons, as well as Christ, are often left to the power of the devil. The devil lifts up, only in order to cast down and destroy. We could never believe how much power the devil still retains over us, so long as our regeneration and adoption continue imperfect, did we not see an instance of it even in the person of Christ, the Son of God by nature, over whom he never had any manner of right. It is in our stead, and for our sakes, that he suffers this outrageous attempt of the evil spirit; and it is by this that he weakens his power, diminishes his rights, and hinders him from encroaching upon us.

6. And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

The curiosity of Adam, presumptuous confidence in God's assistance, and superstitious credulity, are cured by this second temptation. It is because Christ is the *Son of God*, that he takes so much care not to tempt his Father. His confidence is perfect, but prudent, subject to the disposition of God, and regulated by his will. The devil lays snares for us by the means of the Scripture, and of the most sacred things. He often inspires into souls a false confidence in God, in order to make them lose the true, and thereby cast them into despair, when they see they are deserted by God in that danger into which they have so rashly brought themselves.

7. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

To desire to know the power and mysteries of God by sensible experience, is no other than to tempt him. Faith is sufficient to a sincere heart. We render ourselves unworthy of the protection of God, and of the supports of his ordinary providence, when we create new wants to ourselves without necessity, and contrary to his will. Nothing is more common than to tempt God; and because it is a sin so very common, we take no notice at all of it.

8. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

The vanity, pride, and ambition of Adam are cured by the third temptation of Jesus Christ, the new Adam. To love to see the pomps and riches of the world, is to expose ourselves to this temptation. We certainly open our heart to the love of false riches, when we open our mouth to praise them in others. Parents do the devil's office, when they raise in their children an esteem and desire of advancement, of great wealth, and of the glory of the world, by causing them to see and admire these things in others.

9. And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

The devil promises that which is not his own. God seems to give up riches and honours to the power of the devil, and of those who belong to him, as things unworthy of his elect. How can a child of God esteem and set his heart upon them? The devil discovers himself by this promise; for God has never promised to his servants these false riches, any otherwise than to represent to them the promise of the true and eternal riches. Would to God, the world were not so full of persons who make wealth their god, and fall down and worship those who bestow it!

10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

God alone is truly worthy of our service, adoration, and love. To worship, is not to say, I worship and adore thee; but it is to be really obedient to God, and from the bottom of the heart to prefer his will before all things, to live and act only for him, and to esteem nothing but him, or with relation to him. When we see men busied and employed about every thing except their God, can we believe that there are many who worship and serve him only? Grant, O Lord, that by thy grace, I may be among the small number of those who worship thee in truth, and serve none but thee!

11. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

God generally makes joy and consolation succeed temptation and trouble. He does not send invisible angels to comfort

those who, for his sake, have suffered the assaults of the devil or of the world; but a vigilant director, (of the conscience,) a charitable pastor, or a faithful friend, is a visible angel, who receives from God an invisible mission to go to the assistance of a soul which is in trouble. When will it be, O my Saviour, that our temptation being finished, and the devil having left us, we shall serve thee in perfect peace, in the company of angels, and be forever satisfied with the enjoyment of thyself?

SECT. II.—CHRIST'S RESIDENCE AT CAPERNAUM.—HIS EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE.

12. ¶ Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;

It is prudence and humility to avoid danger and persecution. To wait for it without necessity, and to no good purpose, is to expose one's neighbour to the temptation of doing evil, and one's self to the danger of sinking under it. When the passions of men are raised, we imitate Jesus Christ by taking out of their way even the most innocent occasions.

13. And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zebulun and Nephthalim:

As Christ came to Nazareth out of obedience, so he goes from thence upon the same motive: necessity pointing out the will and command of God. He has no other choice but the persevering mind to do the will of his Father.

14. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 15. The land of Zebulun, and the land of Nephthalim, *by* the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;

Christ will not begin his preaching in his own country, nor among his own relations. All the ways and steps of Jesus Christ are marked out in the Scriptures, that he might be a man of obedience in all the stages of his life. We imitate him but ill, when we resolve to be governed by none but ourselves, and to do nothing but our own will.

16. The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

Darkness cannot possibly merit light, nor the sinner the

mercy of God; but yet light is pleased to shine through the thickest darkness, and God to show mercy to the most miserable. To me, O Lord, thou hast already, and dost still show this mercy, as often as thou dost not abandon me to my own darkness. If the light of grace be not joined to that of the gospel, the latter does nothing else but blind, as it blinded the Jews. My God, let not these two lights be separated in me!

17. ¶ From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Jesus begins his preaching, not by flattering men in their inclinations, but by that which is most necessary for them. Repentance is the only gate of heaven for sinners; he who pretends to show any other, is not a guide, but a seducer. Whenever Christ comes to men, whether by his incarnation, or by the eucharist, or by the last judgment, the kingdom of heaven is then at hand, and repentance must always go forth to meet him. Nothing but a penitent heart can perform repentance; and this heart is the gift of God. To will and to do is chiefly the work of God in repentance, because it is that to which man is most averse.

SECT. III.—THE CALLING OF PETER AND ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN.

18. ¶ And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

Jesus chooses the simple and the poor, to intrust them with the treasures of faith, of the ministry, and of the knowledge of salvation. Let us learn from hence, not to judge of the call to ecclesiastical dignities by birth, wit, or natural talents. He calls and blesses those who are busied in an innocent and quiet employment. To pass immediately from a tumultuous and distracting employment to the ministry of peace and holiness: is this to follow his Spirit?

19. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

It is a very great honour to follow Christ, and to be

admitted to a partnership in his priesthood; but unhappy those, who do not wait for the call of God! To presume to take the name and employment of "fishers of men," and yet never to cast the net of the divine word: is this according to the design and intention of Christ? He who follows Jesus Christ in order to be a fisher of men, only in consulting his own inclination for this employment, and does not follow him in imitating his virtues, and guiding himself by his Spirit, though he does not perhaps enter as a thief, yet at least he lives like a hireling.

20. And they straightway left *their* nets, and followed him.

How powerful is the voice of Jesus Christ! Let us remember to beseech him often, that he would be pleased to speak to our hearts and make us obedient to him. Vices and inveterate habits are a sort of nets, which sinners are abundantly more unwilling to leave, than Peter and Andrew were to leave theirs; but every thing is equally possible to him who can do all things. These poor men leave indeed only nets; but they certainly leave a great deal who reserve nothing for themselves.

21. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

Sometimes God is pleased to unite by grace those who are already united by nature, to show that he does not design to destroy, but to repair it; sometimes he separates them to prove their sincerity, to show the force of his grace and of his love; to make known his sovereign power, and that he chooses his ministers with distinction, and with the greatest wisdom. There is a time to cast the nets into the sea, that is, to labour for the salvation of others; and a time to mend them, that is, for a man to prepare himself for labour, to make the best amends he can for his wandering and other imperfections, by prayer and retirement, to gain new strength, and to fortify himself against the dangers to which he may probably be exposed.

22. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

We must renounce all human expectations, and all the

tenderness of nature, (represented here by the nets and the father of these apostles,) in order to enter into the ministry with a true apostolic spirit. And what shall we not find in thee, O Jesus, if we leave all for thy sake! He who but just now united brethren, by calling them to the ministry of grace, now separate the sons from their father, to teach them to obey God at the expense of all things, and to prefer the honour of serving him in poverty and humility to all the comforts of a father's house.

SECT. IV.—THE PREACHING, MIRACLES, AND REPUTATION OF CHRIST.

23. ¶ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. 24. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. 25. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and *from* Decapolis, and *from* Jerusalem, and *from* Judea, and *from* beyond Jordan.

See here the perfect pattern of an evangelical preacher. (1.) To go to seek out sinners on every side, that he may show them the way to heaven. (2.) To preach "the gospel of the kingdom," not with a servile spirit, but with a freedom worthy of the King whom he serves, and of the kingdom which he proclaims. (3.) To make his reputation and the confidence of the people subservient, not to his own interest, but to the good of souls, and to the establishing the kingdom of God. (4.) To speak nothing but what may tend toward salvation. (5.) To preaching to join the exercise of works of mercy and temporal assistance as often as he can. (6.) To assist all those who apply to him as penitents, how great sinners, and of what condition soever they be. (7.) To take care to make them sensible, that diseases, and all kinds of temporal evils, are the effects of sin; that whether God be pleased to remove them or not, it is for the good of the soul, and to promote our eternal salvation; and that the power which he makes appear in healing them, is a sure pledge of the power of his grace in healing our souls.

CHAPTER V.

SECT. I.—THE EIGHT BEATITUDES.

1. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

Since all Christians are the disciples of Christ, they have all a right to hear his word. To this end they must have a disciple's heart, humble, full of respect, teachable, swift to hear, eager to learn, and faithful to obey. To go up with Christ, is to lift up one's heart from the earth, in order to hear the truths of heaven. To sit down, is to hear them with calmness, peace, and repose of mind. To come unto this divine Master, is to be united to him, and to hear him with faith, attention, and love for his word.

2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

How great is the mercy of God toward man, in that wisdom herself is sent to instruct him, not by angels nor by prophets, nor in dreams nor in figures, but with her own mouth, and in her own words. When we open the New Testament, it is the mouth of Christ which is opened for us. It is no other than to shut it from Christians, either to wrest this holy book out of their hands, or to keep it closed up, by taking from them the means of understanding it.

3. Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The first lesson of Christ is concerning poverty and Christian humility. To be poor in possessing much, is to be disengaged from wealth, to use it like a poor man, and to look upon it as a burden or as a trust. Happy then those souls who have embraced the state of poverty and humility of spirit, provided they have the spirit of that state! The kingdom of heaven is theirs, provided nothing of the kingdom of earth live and reign in their heart. Covetousness is of so malignant a nature, that one may have the poison of riches in the midst of poverty; grace is so powerful, that one may have

the blessing of poverty in the midst of riches. God by no means permits himself to be outdone in generosity; he gives all for all, or rather, all for nothing: heaven for earth, himself for us. In what does the kingdom of heaven in this life consist, but in the riches of faith, the grace of God, his truth, his Spirit, etc.? And to whom does he communicate them more abundantly, but to those who are most disengaged for his sake from the good things of the world?

4. Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

The second lesson of Christ teaches us, that the afflictions which men suffer for the sake of God, and the tears of repentance which they shed for their own sins, and for those of others, are sources of true comfort. Every one flies from tears, and seeks after joy; and yet true joy must necessarily be the fruit of tears. Self-love, pride, and covetousness have their sorrow and their tears; but God wipes away only those of humility, charity, poverty, and repentance. May the sweets of temporal prosperity, of the favour of men, and of the diversions of the world, be forever far removed from me, because they are inconsistent with thine, O my God, and with the consolations of thy Spirit.

5. Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

The third lesson of Christ is the meekness of charity, in heart, in countenance, and in word. It is no small victory for a man to subdue the severity of his temper. The meekness which leads to blessedness is not a meekness of constitution, of artifice, or of deceit; but a meekness of grace, of charity, and of patience. It is disposed to suffer itself to be spoiled of all in this world; but of what treasures, what inheritances, does it not put us into possession in the land of the living? To possess the land of our heart in patience, is the beginning of the perfect kingdom of charity and the fruit of Christian meekness. Instruct us, Lord, in this virtue, thou who art the master and the teacher of it!

6. Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

The fourth lesson of Christ shows us, that a zeal for righteousness and perfection, a hatred of sin and of the un-

righteousness of the age, and the desire of the sovereign and eternal righteousness, ought to be the sole hunger and thirst of our heart. The salutary hunger is after that alone which can nourish and satisfy our soul according to God. The hunger after every thing else is either a disease of the body, or a folly of the mind. May I hunger after nothing but thee, O my God, because thou alone canst feed me here on earth and satisfy me in heaven!

7. Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

The fifth lesson of Christ is compassion on the miseries of others, which consists in aiding them with our substance, our counsel, our cares, and our prayers, both for the body and the soul. Mercy is not purchased but at the price of mercy itself; and this price is even a gift of the mercy of God. We think ourselves disposed to show great instances of mercy, when we perceive ourselves inclined to pardon great injuries; when perhaps it is either because the opportunities for it are at a distance, or because there may be honour in doing it, and danger in the contrary. But as for those little instances of mercy which we have every day many opportunities of showing, by reason of aversions, peevish, troublesome, contradicting, and unequal humours, light offences, small differences, and the like, with how much difficulty do we exercise them, if we do it at all! He who gratifies his resentment, when he thinks he can do it without being damned, ought to fear that his compassion is only servile and mercenary on the greater occasions. What mercy can those vindictive persons hope for, who forgive nothing, and are always ready to imbrue their hands in the blood of their brethren?

8. Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

The sixth lesson of Christ is, that the purity of a heart, either preserved after baptism, or repaired by repentance, consists in loving God alone. Filthy objects are not the only things which defile the heart; whatever it loves contrary to the command and will of God renders it impure. O infinite purity! what heart can ever be worthy to see thee, unless thou purify it, by engaging it entirely to thyself!

9. Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

The seventh lesson of Christ recommends to us a zeal for peace. We ought to preserve it with God, our neighbour, and ourselves, and to procure it wherever we can. Whose children then are those, who sow or foment division in the church, or in families, if not of the spirit of discord, which reigns only by hate and division? O lovely and desirable *peace!* of which God is the God and Father, his Son the mediator and victim, the Holy Ghost the inspirer and band, and the church the kingdom and family! When shall we possess thee? When wilt thou be perfect?

10. Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Lastly, the eighth lesson of Christ is concerning the happiness of suffering for righteousness' sake; but few persons comprehend this happiness, and fewer still desire to partake of it. To be willing to suffer for righteousness from the hands of Christians, is a grace more rare than to be persecuted for the faith by infidels. There are more in proportion who give up their life for the sake of the latter, than there are who, upon the account of the former, sacrifice their ease, their interest, and their fortune. But what! cannot the kingdom of heaven make us sufficient amends for what we suffer upon the account of righteousness, as well as upon the account of faith?

11. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Persecution for righteousness and truth includes in it contempt, mockery, injuries, and contradictions, suffered in serving God, at the hands of the wicked and of worldly men. Whom shall we believe? Either Jesus Christ, who places our present happiness in this; or our own self-love, which fixes it in the esteem, the praises, the caresses, and favours of the world? The cause of God and of Christ is the cause of faith and the gospel, of truth and righteousness, of God's glory and our sanctification, of the church and her interests.

12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Is there any thing greater, than by means of persecution to enter into fellowship with the prophets and apostles, even in this life; and to expect God for our reward in the other? This is a subject not only of joy, but of an excess of joy and of rapture. A joy not of sense, but of faith and hope, which does not stifle the perception of pain, but feeds upon it, and causes us to embrace it; which does not distract the heart, but unites it to God. How precious and valuable is this communion, by which we are admitted to a fellowship in sufferings, not only with the prophets and apostles, but with Christ himself; and which is to us a pledge of his love, and of his Spirit.

SECT. II—THE APOSTLES THE SALT AND LIGHT OF THE EARTH. —THE LAW NOT DESTROYED.—DOING AND TEACHING.

13. ¶ Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Bishops and priests ought to be, (1.) Holy, that they may sanctify sinners, in taking away the rottenness and corruption of sin by the salt of the word, of prayer, of repentance, of sacraments, etc. Christians are likewise, in some sense, the "salt of the earth;" when, being preserved from corruption themselves, they preserve others from it; make them relish God and his gospel, and have the salt of true wisdom, and the spirit of Jesus Christ. What then is a bishop without strength and virtue, a priest without piety and zeal, a Christian without faith or charity, but even salt which has lost its savour, worthy to be rejected of God, and despised of men? How great must be the miracle which can restore to this salt its first strength and savour!

14. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

Bishops and priests ought to be, (2.) Learned, to instruct. (3.) Open, and easy of access to all, in order to do them service. Of what advantage is it to a Christian to be light, in respect of his faith and calling, if he be nothing but darkness

as to his life and actions? If an infidel, instead of seeing the light of the gospel and the purity of faith shine in our conversation, discovers nothing there but the darkness of sin, we certainly blind, instead of enlightening him. The Christian life is something very high and sublime, to which we cannot arrive without pains; while it withdraws us from the earth, and carries us nearer heaven, it places us in view, and as a mark to the malice of carnal men.

15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Bishops and priests ought to be, (4.) Of good example, that they may edify others. What is this city and this house, but the universal church, one, holy, immovable, raised above all human things, contained in one only society, united by one sole communion, and enlightened by one doctrine alone? Out of this house, there is nothing but darkness. Out of this hill, there is no stability. Out of this city, there is [ordinarily] no salvation.

16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Bishops and priests ought to be, (5.) Humble, that they may seek nothing but the glory of God. They are obliged to five duties: First, To dispense light; Secondly, To join good works thereto; Thirdly, To direct them all to God; Fourthly, To do it with a filial heart; and that, Fifthly, lifted up to the things of heaven. How rare and extraordinary a thing is it to discharge these duties! How difficult to shine only for God, to work only for heaven!

17. ¶ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Bishops and priests ought to be, (6.) Faithful, in doing that first themselves which they require of others, in imitation of Jesus Christ. Yes, Lord, thou fulfillest the law: in *itself*, adding what is wanting to perfect it, and supplying its inability to satisfy God, and sanctify man; in *thyself*, submitting to its types with an exact obedience, and verifying them by thy death upon the cross; in *thy members*, giving them what

it promised, and enabling them by thy grace and love to fulfil what it commands. Fulfil it in me, O Lord.

18. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

There is nothing so little in the law, but it has its truth and completion in Jesus Christ or in his church. The word of God is immutable, because his power is infinite. His mercy will infallibly be accomplished in the saints; his justice will be inflexibly executed upon sinners.

19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The only just and holy ambition is to desire to be great in heaven; but the only means for a bishop or priest to be so, is not only to *do*, but also to *teach* the gospel. Every part of the law carries in it equally the authority and will of God; we oppose this, when we violate that. There is nothing more little and contemptible in the sight of God, than a pastor, who, by his principles, his discourse, and his life, diverts those from the meditation and practice of the divine law, whom by all these methods he ought to incite thereto. It is neither eminence of see, nor abundance of wealth, nor magnificence of equipage, nor learning, nor authority, nor the favour of princes, which makes a great prelate; but it is in *doing* and *teaching*, that his true greatness does consist.

SECT. III.—EXCEEDING RIGHTEOUSNESS.—INJURIOUS WORD.—RECONCILIATION.

20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Let us often consider, how great the perfection of the evangelical law is. It must be internal, spiritual, and in the truth of God. Who can flatter himself with having come near the exactness of these persons in avoiding open and visible sins, and in fulfilling the external part of the law, with having come near the length of their prayers and the austerity of their lives? And yet, in order to be saved, one must sur-

pass them in righteousness. That which God principally requires is righteousness of heart, charity, humility, a sincere love of the law, of justice, etc. Whoever has not these, may be the most holy person in the world before men, and the most contemptible in the sight of God.

21. ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 22. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Observe here the punishment, (1.) Of murder; (2.) Of Anger; (3.) Of an angry word; (4.) Of an injurious word. Who will not tremble at these words? who will not dread the judgment of God, who condemns and punishes the external effects of anger, in proportion to the hatred which a man carries in his heart? Murder is the most punishable of all crimes, according to the written law, in respect both of our neighbour and of civil society. But he who sees the heart, and who judges it by the eternal law, punishes as much a word or a desire, if the hatred from whence they proceed be complete and perfected.

23. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee;

Of how great importance is it for a man, before the communion, to examine whether he has nothing in his heart which is contrary to charity! A Christian has no enemies at all; he has only brethren, looking upon all men as children of God and members of Christ, or, at least, as capable of becoming such. If a brotherly heart was required even of a Jew, in order to his offering a bullock or a lamb; what ought then to be the charity of a Christian, who offers up (the representative sacrifice of) the Son of God, and who is obliged to receive him into his heart?

24. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

No sacrifice can be acceptable to God, unless it be accompanied with that of a sincere charity. The gift and offering which God prefers to all others, is for a man to take away,

out of his own and his brother's heart, all seeds of hatred, by an humble and necessary satisfaction, or by a charitable and voluntary prevention. It is to fly in the face of the Son of God with respect to his doctrine and command, to send to the communion, or to admit to the grace of reconciliation, a sinner who will neither forgive nor make any satisfaction for injuries. A religion, the very soul of which is charity, cannot suffer at the feet of its altars a heart which is revengeful, or which does not use its utmost endeavour to revive charity in the heart of another.

25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

It is a real folly for a man not to be reconciled while he has time. Unhappy he, who puts it off till death; still more unhappy he, who lets slip this last and precious moment, the loss whereof is irreparable. But how great is the madness, how desperate the rage of the duellist, who goes in cold blood to deliver himself up to his judge, to seek his executioner, and to cast himself into the eternal prison, by being the occasion of his own death, either through the engagement of a false honour, or out of a foolish vanity, or in following the torrent of a diabolical custom, or even under the actual impulse of a mortal hatred, and while his heart is entirely possessed and inflamed with the desire and with the last effort of revenge!

26. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

How terrible is thy justice, O my God, even to the most righteous! What will become of him whom thou shalt judge according to rigour? He who has not laboured before his death to change justice into mercy by a sincere repentance, shall never escape out of God's hands.

SECT. IV.—ADULTERY IN THE HEART.—THE PLUCKING OUT AN EYE.

27. ¶ Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

It is the property of a Pharisee to abstain only from the outward crime. Men are very often less inquisitive to know

how far the will of God extends, that they may please him in performing it, than how far they may satisfy their lusts, without destroying themselves by an open violation of the law.

28. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Christian righteousness is the righteousness of the heart. Concupiscence or charity renders the use of the senses good or evil. If voluntary and deliberate looks or desires make adulterers, how many persons are there, whose whole life is but one continual adultery, which they commit even at the foot of the altar? Men would abhor to commit one external act before the eyes of men, in a temple of stone, and yet they are not in the least afraid to commit a great number of them, in the temple of their own heart, and in the sight of God.

29. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Sometimes pride or fear keeps us from giving the outward scandal, which causes the fall of our neighbour; but we do not at all watch over our own heart, to avoid the inward scandal or offence which make us fall ourselves. Let us tear up our evil desires and our corrupt will, and we shall then pluck out our eye, by preventing the bad use which that causes us to make of this. One cannot pluck out an eye without pain, nor without violence; much less an evil inclination, which corrupts the heart. Nothing but thy grace, my God, can perform this necessary and difficult operation. Would to God the sinner would often make the comparison, which our blessed Saviour causes us here to make of the vain and transitory pleasures of sin, with the inconceivable and eternal pains of hell.

30. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.

This is to shut the gate against the enemy; namely, to shut our senses against dangerous objects, to avoid the occasions of sin, and to deprive ourselves of all that is most dear to us, in order to save our souls. Men often part with the

members of the body, at the discretion of a surgeon, that they may preserve the trunk and die a little later; and yet they will not deprive themselves of a look, a touch, a small pleasure, to save the soul, and secure themselves from dying eternally. It is not enough to shut the eye, nor to stop the hand; the one must be "plucked out," and the other "cut off." Neither is this yet enough; we must "cast them both from us." Not one moment's truce with lust; it must be rooted up and destroyed. But, alas! the end of this work is not to be seen in this life.

SECT. V.—MARRIAGE INDISSOLUBLE.—SWEARING.

31. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

God permitted this evil, to prevent a greater, and to prefigure his repudiating the synagogue, which was his first spouse. A Christian ought rather to beg of God the grace to bear patiently and quietly the faults and imperfections of his wife, than to think of the means of being parted from her. That which was allowed to the hardness of an uncircumcised heart, ought not to serve as a rule to a heart into which charity has been infused by the Holy Ghost.

32. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

How inviolable ought to be the alliance of man with his God by charity, since conjugal society is only an image and figure of it; as it is likewise (an emblem) of the union of Christ with our nature in the incarnation, and with his church. Marriage, which bears so great a relation to this mystery, ought to resemble it likewise in its indissolubility. A husband should be inseparably joined to his wife, as Christ is to his church.

33. ¶ Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

They violate this commandment who dishonour God by blasphemies; impious jests; swearing in light matters; fre-

quent and customary oaths, especially on wicked accounts; and frivolous, unprofitable, and irreligious vows. It is a very old abuse, to weaken the law of God without scruple, to lighten the yoke of it without authority, and to enlarge the way to heaven by arbitrary and presumptuous explications. To believe that only the perjured person dishonours God in relation to this precept, is to understand very little the holiness of the divine name.

34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 35. Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

All swearing without necessity is forbidden. Who is there, among the traders and people of the world, who obeys this law? He who swears of his own accord, without discretion, without judgment, and by custom, is in continual danger of being perjured. When we make any promise contrary to the command of God, taking as a pledge of our sincerity, either God, or something belonging to him, we engage that which is not ours without the master's consent. To make any imprecation against ourselves, with relation to heaven, the earth, or sacred things, of which God has given us the use, is to dispose of ourselves, of the gifts of God, and of his creatures, without the leave, and against the will, of the sovereign Master. God manifests his glory in heaven as upon his throne; he imprints the footsteps of his divine perfections upon every thing on earth as upon his footstool; and shows, that his holiness and his grace reign in his temple, as in the place of his residence, and in his palace. Let it be one of our most constant and ordinary cares, to seek and honour God in all his works.

36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

How dares man presume to dispose of his person, his time, and his goods, contrary to the command and appointment of God, since he is not able so much as to change the colour of one single hair?

37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Simplicity is most commonly to be found with truth. Let

us be sure not to use an oath for the sake of little temporal interests: this is to abuse religion, and to make God subservient to mammon. The abuse of an oath proceeds, either from the distrust of him who requires it, or from the wickedness of him of whom it is required, or from lightness, or irreverence. Wisdom, probity, and religion would remedy all. Nothing is more contrary to the Spirit of God, and to the doctrine of Jesus Christ, than to render oaths common in the church; because it multiplies the occasions of perjury, lays snares for the weak and ignorant, and sometimes makes the name and truth of God subservient to the designs of the wicked.

SECT. VI.—PATIENCE.

38. ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

How many Christians are there worse than Jews, who carry their revenge to the utmost extremity, and return even more evil than they have received! There is a great deal of difference between what the law appointed to the Jews for the public safety, and what charity requires of us for our particular perfection; between the duty of a judge, who ought to punish according to the law, and the tempter of a Christian, who ought to pardon according to the gospel.

39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Patience, and true Christian charity, incline a man to quit, to do, to give, and to suffer all things. First, in his person, all sorts of affronts, at least in the disposition of mind. We are allowed to demand justice; but never to avenge ourselves, never to desire punishment for itself, but either for the public good, or for the welfare of private persons. Christian patience and evangelical prudence must concur to regulate the use of this counsel; for it is not always expedient to do that publicly, which it is always necessary to be disposed to do at the bottom of the heart. We ought to take care not to deprive ourselves of this blessing by too much reasoning, or by the delusion of self-love.

40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloak also.

Patience and Christian charity would have us be in the same disposition in relation to our goods. It is a gain to lose them, rather than the treasure of charity and peace. These words contain only matter of advice; but the foundation of this advice, namely, the having a mind averse to law, and the preferring peace and Christian concord to temporal advantages—this is a precept. We are great gainers when we lose only our money, because we will not run the risk of losing our souls by losing charity.

41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Lastly, patience and Christian charity would have us be disposed to suffer in our bodies all sorts of toils, vexations, and torments, that we may be martyrs of charity and peace. Jesus Christ went beyond this advice, when, without being in the least constrained thereto, he suffered himself to be set on a pinnacle of the temple, and taken up into the mountain by the devil, and to be led to the top of Calvary by the Jews. Few persons are exposed to these kinds of vexations; but all are exposed to suffer injustice. If we always believe that our sufferings are less than we deserve in the sight of God, we need never fear our being mistaken, or doing any injustice to ourselves. The way to improve the injustice of men to our own advantage, is to suffer their violence with a view to the justice of God.

42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

To give and to lend freely to all who are in need is a general precept, from which we are not excused, but by our inability to perform it. Men are more or less obliged to it, as they are more or less able; as the want is more or less pressing; as they are more or less burdened with poor; or by their office as pastors; or by the necessities of their relations; or by the opportunities and demands of providence; or by the duty of restitution and satisfaction. In this matter we must consult prudence and more charity. He who makes use of

the beggar's hand to ask our charity, is the same of whom we ourselves beg every day our bread; and dare we refuse Him! Let us show, at least, mildness and compassion, when we can do no more. To give and to lend are two duties of charity, which Christ joins together, and which he sets upon an equal footing. The loan is sometimes more beneficial than the absolute gift, because it flatters less the vanity and natural generosity of him who lends; it spares more the shame of him who is in real want, and gives less encouragement to the idleness of him who may not be very honest.

SECT. VII.—THE LOVE OF ENEMIES.—PERFECTION.

43. ¶ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

We must love our enemies in heart, in word, and in deed; desiring their welfare, praying for them, speaking well of them, and assisting them as occasion requires. The enemies whom Christ here enjoins us to love, are either those who hate us, or those whom we do not love. A man certainly bears a hostile mind, when he therein cherishes aversion and hatred, either with or without cause. This one precept alone is a sufficient proof of the holiness of the gospel, and of the truth of the Christian religion. None but God could have imposed a yoke so contrary to self-love; and nothing but the supreme and infinite charity could have made men love and practise a law so insupportable to corrupt nature. In vain do men flatter themselves with loving their enemies, if their works do not give testimony thereof.

45. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

There is nothing greater than to imitate God in doing good to our enemies. All the creatures pronounce on the revengeful the sentence of their condemnation, wrote with the rays of the sun, the drops of rain, and all the other natural good things, the use whereof God gives even to his enemies. If

God had not loved us while we were his enemies, we could never have become his children; and we shall cease to be so, if we cease to imitate him.

46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

He who loves only his friends does nothing for God's sake. This is the virtue of a publican and a heathen, which will have no other reward but theirs. God is the reward of that virtue only, of which he himself is the principle and the end. He who loves for the sake of pleasure or interest, rewards himself, and pays himself with his own hands. He who loves for the sake of God, loves his gifts in all men. God has no enemy but sin; we ought to have no other.

47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others?* do not even the publicans so?

If not to salute be a heathenish indifference, to hide hatred under civilities is a diabolical treachery. It is easy enough to show a signal instance of generosity to a declared enemy to gain honour before men. But to speak kindly, mildly, and cordially to one whose humour we do not like, or from whom we have received some affront, how rare a thing is this! how hard and grievous is it to nature! Thou alone, O divine Repairer of our corrupt nature! thou alone canst render this pleasant and agreeable to it by thy grace.

48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

God is, in himself, the principal law, and the chief pattern of the perfection of the man and of the Christian. God has but too many bad imitators of his power, of the simplicity of his nature, of his independency, and of his vengeance; but he has very few of his love, his condescension, and his indulgence. He calls himself love, to teach us, that in this consists the perfection to which he would have us aspire. God is more easily to be imitated by his children, in the perfections whereby he appears a Father, than in those whereby he appears a God: these for heaven; those for the earth.

CHAPTER VI.

SECT. I.—ALMS.

1. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

The best way is to do good works in secret, as far as is consistent with the advancement of God's glory. The devil engages the wicked to do evil with pleasure, and the righteous to do good out of vanity. Let us wait with patience one moment; the eternal reward can neither fail us nor be delayed. To desire to be paid ready money by the hands of men, is the way to lose all; but to trust God, is to enrich ourselves forever.

2. Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

To do alms in secret is to offer a double sacrifice. A transient and momentary honour is the empty reward of vain men. Unhappy he, who, in parting with his wealth, deprives himself, by his vanity, of the heavenly riches. It is, as it were, attempting to impose upon God with a wrong title, for a man to endeavour to sell that to him which he has already sold to vain-glory.

3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

It is good to conceal our good works, even from our nearest relations, unless we are under an obligation of edifying them. We ought to proceed farther, to conceal them, as one may say, even from ourselves, by not allowing ourselves the satisfaction so much as to think on them, or to lay them before our eyes by reflections of complacency and self-love. They are given to God, and therefore they ought to be kept hid in him.

4. That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

The substantial reward of the secret virtue of the humble is conferred openly. Our alms is our treasure; not to hide it, is to expose ourselves to being robbed. He who seeks any other approbation than that of God, forgets that he is made only for him, and that he ought ultimately to refer all to him alone.

SECT. II.—PRAYER.

5. ¶ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are:* for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

In order to approach God, and to incline him to give ear to our prayer, it is necessary to pray out of the hearing of men, and without affecting to be seen by them. A man loves the world when he seeks to please it, and this love spoils the best works. God is a jealous God, and cannot share with any one what is due to himself alone; and this not out of envy, but goodness. He is not afraid of losing any thing, but of being obliged not to give, and not to bestow himself.

6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

The heart is God's peculiar portion; he is the judge of it; it belongs to him to reward. It is in this that he will be worshipped and adored. Prayer is the most secret intercourse of the soul with God, and, as it were, the conversation of one heart with another. The world is too profane and treacherous to be of the secret. We must shut the door against it, by forgetting it, and all the affairs which busy and amuse it. Prayer requires retirement, at least of the heart; for this is the closet in the house of God, which house is ourselves. Thither we ought to retire, even in public prayer, and in the midst of company. What goodness is there equal to this of God, to give not only what we ask, and more than we ask of him, but to reward even prayer itself! What advantage is it to serve a prince, who places prayers in the

number of services, and reckons to his subjects' account even their trust and confidence in begging all things of him.

7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do:* for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Prayer requires more of the heart than of the tongue, of sighs than of words, of faith than of discourse. The eloquence of prayer consists in the fervency of desire, in the simplicity of faith, and in the earnestness and perseverance of charity. The abundance and choice of fine thoughts, studied and vehement motions, and the order and politeness of the expressions, are things which compose a mere human harangue, not an humble and Christian prayer. Our trust and confidence ought to proceed from that which God is able to do in us, not from that which we can say to God.

8. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Prayer is not designed to inform God, but to give man a sight of his misery, to humble his heart, to excite his desire, to inflame his faith, to animate his hope, to raise his soul toward heaven, and to put him in mind that there is his Father, his country, his inheritance. He is a Father to whom we pray; let us go to him with confidence: he knows our wants; let us remove far from us all anxious disquiet and concern.

9. After this manner therefore pray ye:

The prayer which Jesus Christ gives us here is the pattern of all Christian prayer, and an abridgement of the gospel. What satisfaction it is to learn, from God himself, with what words and in what manner he would have us pray to him, so as not to pray in vain! A king, who himself draws up the petition which he allows to be presented to himself, has surely a very great desire to grant the request. We do not sufficiently conceive the value of this prayer, the respect and attention which it requires, the preference to be given to it, its fulness and perfection, the frequent use we should make of it, and the spirit which we should bring along with us to it. The order of the petitions is the order of our desires and

of our duties; it is here we ought to be particularly mindful of them.

Our Father which art in heaven,

1st, We must, in the first place, say this prayer with the heart of a heavenly child, disengaged from the earth by his new birth, animated with the Spirit of the divine adoption, and full of desire to be reunited to his Father and Author. The heart of a child of God is a brotherly heart, in respect of all other Christians; it asks nothing but in the spirit of unity, fellowship, and Christian charity, desiring that for its brethren which it desires for itself. Let us adore God in the unity and simplicity of his essence, in the trinity and fellowship of his persons; as the Father of Christians, the source and model of all paternity both in heaven and earth, and the Author of all created good.

Hallowed be thy name.

2d, We must say it, with the heart of a priest, all inflamed with zeal for God's glory, and for the sanctification of souls, and with the desire of that holiness, which should render him like to God as to his Father. In the sanctification of the elect and of the whole church, God is pleased to place his glory; and, therefore, this glory and this sanctification we ought to desire and to pray for before all things. Let us adore the holiness of God; let us desire that his holy name may be everywhere known; let us labour to this purpose with all our power, beginning first with ourselves.

10. Thy kingdom come.

3d, We must say it with the heart of a faithful subject, zealous for the glory of his sovereign. When will it be, O my God, that death and sin, the devil and his ministers, the world and its offences, shall cease to reign upon earth; and that thou, after having judged the quick and the dead, separated thy elect from the reprobate, and destroyed all the powers of earth and hell, wilt thyself reign alone everywhere, in all, and forever, and thy saints with thee, and with thy Son? In order to desire the coming of this kingdom, it is necessary to be in a condition to expect it with confidence.

Let us adore the sovereignty of God, and labour to establish his kingdom in our own hearts.

Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.

4th, We must say it with the heart of a wife who studies the desires and inclinations of her husband, and seeks only to please him. God everywhere effects his will, even in those who oppose it the most; but it is done, with and by love, in none but the saints in heaven and on earth. We acknowledge the necessity of a grace, which, by a free and predominant love, may subject our will to that of God, when we pray that "his will may be done in us as it is in heaven." It is by this that God reigns, and that his name is hallowed. Let us adore the almighty will of God, and desire that it may work in us, so as to subject us to itself.

11. Give us this day our daily bread

5th, We must say it with the heart of a sheep, which requires food from its shepherd; and of one really in want, who begs his bread. We ought to ask of God the bread of the body; but much more the bread of the soul,—his grace, his word, the divine eucharist, the love of his law, and the accomplishment of his will. God will have us depend on him. He gives not to the body all its nourishment, nor to the soul all the grace which is necessary for it, on purpose to oblige us to pray; and prayer, which proves that we always stand in need of this grace, proves also that we have it not always. Let us adore the providence of God, let us love to depend upon it, and let us frequently have recourse to it.

12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

6th, We must say it with the heart of a penitent who begs mercy of his God, while he affords it to his neighbour in all respects. That man condemns himself to suffer the eternal vengeance of God, who makes use of this prayer with revenge and hatred in his heart. He who observes not the condition of a transaction so advantageous, does not comprehend what he owes to God, and is a madman who resolves to perish. Let us adore the infinite love and mercy of God; and let us

beseech him to give us such a heart as is indulgent, charitable, and always ready to forgive.

13. And lead us not into temptation,

7th, We must say it with the heart of a sick person, who implores the assistance of his physician, acknowledging that he deserves to be forsaken by him. The way of salvation is a way of humility, and the Christian grace a grace of combat. There is nothing makes men more humble, renders them more vigilant, and obliges them to have recourse more frequently to the arms of faith and prayer, than their being unable to ascribe to themselves any good, their perceiving themselves capable of all evil, their having a domestic enemy who leaves them not one moment's quiet or security, and their depending continually upon a grace which is not due, and of which they are altogether unworthy. Let us adore the wonderful contrivance and wisdom of God in the work of our salvation; and let us give up ourselves entirely to him, that he may not give us up to ourselves.

But deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Lastly, we must say it with the heart of a captive, an exile, or an afflicted person, who has recourse to his deliverer. With how many snares, how many obstacles to good, how many occasions of sin, how many enemies of salvation are we surrounded, among whom our false friends are the most dangerous! Lord, from thee alone we expect deliverance: delay not to succour us. May the frequent combats, in which the tempter engages us, make us sigh and long after the general deliverance, which will forever banish to hell the tempter and the temptation, all disorderly affection and concupiscence, all sin and wickedness whatsoever. Let us adore the power and justice of the sovereign Judge; let us wait like exiles, to be called home, and, like captives, to be delivered; and let us fly to him for aid under the miseries of our banishment and slavery, and in all the assaults of our enemies.

14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

He who shows mercy to men, receives it from God. For

a king to forgive his subjects a hundred millions, and an infinite number of treasons against his authority and person, on this one condition, that they will but live peaceably with him and with one another, is what we shall never see; and yet this is but the shadow of that which Christ promises on his Father's part to all true penitents. A man must needs love his salvation but little, who refuses to purchase it at this price.

15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

He who does not awake at the sound of so loud a thunder, is not asleep, but dead. It is not without reason that Christ insists thus upon this one petition concerning the forgiveness of sins; since this alone contains the threat of God's eternal wrath, and the necessity of brotherly love. We hazard all, if we either do not understand it, or do transgress it.

SECT. III.—FASTING.

16. ¶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

It is difficult to avoid hypocrisy and ostentation in external mortifications, and chiefly in fasting. He who desires to please men in that which he does by way of atonement to God, seems as if he pretended to expiate and make amends for his affection to the creatures by this affection itself. God turns from the sinner the eyes of his mercy, in the same proportion that he endeavours to draw upon himself those of men. When a man, out of hypocrisy, affects a sad countenance, he has but little of that godly sorrow in his heart which repentance gives.

17. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

The love of God makes us do that with joy which we do for him. Our heart is the same in respect of God, that our head and face are in respect of men. It is by the heart that he knows us, and judges of us; it is by this that we please him. It is this victim of the heart, which we must wash with the water of our tears, and anoint with the spirit of charity, to make it an acceptable sacrifice of repentance.

18. That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

He who takes no care to avoid the sight and applause of the world, has but little desire to be seen and rewarded by God. There is a time to show ourselves to men, through the obligation we have to edify them; and a time to hide ourselves from them, to prevent our own destruction. Let us not be afraid that our heart will be concealed from God; but let us be afraid lest he should discover it to be greedy of the glory which comes from men, and little filled with the desire and esteem of that glory which he alone can confer.

SECT. IV.—TREASURES IN HEAVEN.—THE SINGLE EYE.

19. ¶ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

What blindness is it for a man to lay up that as a treasure which must necessarily perish! This is to degrade a heart designed for God and for eternity, to fix it upon such things as are subject to corruption, and, on their account, to set it in competition with moths.

20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

He who frequently considers the solidity and eternity of the treasures in heaven, little amuses himself with the contemptible goods of the earth. This treasure is laid up by good works, and especially by alms. The only way to render perishing goods eternal, to secure stately furniture from moths, the richest metals from rust, and precious stones from thieves, is to transmit them to heaven by charity. This is a kind of bill of exchange, which cannot fail of acceptance but through our own fault.

21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Happy he, who has a heart only for God, and who has only God in his heart. How misplaced is a heart, when it cleaves either to the smoke of honours, or to the dirt of riches, or to the mire of pleasures! Let our heart, then, O God, rest satisfied in thee alone, since it was made only for thee, and since thou alone art worthy of it.

22. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

The single eye, is the pure intention, and the unity of the end. The eye is neither single nor pure, when it looks upon two objects at once; nor the heart, when it seeks not God and his righteousness only; when it has some other end besides his glory and his will; when it would fain be happy in the enjoyment of some other good together with him; and when it pretends to unite God and the world, to be the servant of Christ and to please men, and to reconcile the gospel with the eager desire of earthly things. Nothing is more single than the eye of faith; there is nothing which renders our whole conduct more uniform in goodness, than to follow singly the light of it.

23. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness!

An evil intention corrupts the best works and renders them evil. Who can conceive the misfortune and corruption of a heart which lays up for itself a double treasure of wrath, by suffering itself to be led away to evil actions by a perverse will, and depriving itself of the fruit of good ones by a bad intention? The way of the righteous is a way of light; that of sinners is nothing but darkness.

SECT. V.—GOD TO BE SERVED, NOT MAMMON.—TRUST.

24. ¶ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

The master of our heart, is the love which reigns in it; we are slaves to that only which we love most. A man cannot be in a perfect indifference between two objects which are incompatible; he is inclined to despise and hate whatever he does not love in the highest degree, when the necessity of a choice presents itself. Could we ever imagine that mammon has the advantage of God in the hearts of the generality of mankind, did not experience force us to believe it? How dangerous is it to set our minds upon riches, since it is so easy to make them our god!

25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what she shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

To be so intent on the means of subsistence as to lose all the satisfaction of it, is to have but very little faith; it is even infidelity. On the other hand, to rely so much upon providence as to do nothing at all, is to tempt God. But to labour, without placing our trust and confidence in our labour, expecting all from the blessing of God: this is to obey him, to co-operate with his providence, to set the springs of it a-going, and to imitate Christ and the saints by a sedate care and an industrious confidence. In the following verses, Christ lays down several reasons why men should not disquiet themselves about the wants of life, or concerning the future. The first is the experience of greater benefits already received. He who gave us life and the body, before we could ask them of him, can he refuse us wherewith to conserve them, when we ask it with an humble confidence? It is ingratitude to fall into distrust with respect to our great Benefactor.

26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

The second reason is the example of the lesser animals, which the providence of God feeds without their own labour, though he be not their Father. We never knew an earthly father take care of his fowls and neglect his children; and shall we fear this from our heavenly Father? That man is unworthy to have God for his father in heaven, who depends less upon his goodness, wisdom, and power, than upon a crop of corn, which may be spoiled, either in the field or in the barn. The excellency of man consists in his being capable of knowing, loving, and enjoying God; and what ought he not to expect from God after so great a gift?

27. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

The third reason is the unprofitableness of human cares, unless God vouchsafe to bless them. What can our own uneasiness do, but only render us unworthy of the divine care? The passage from distrust to apostasy is very short and easy;

and a man is not far from murmuring against providence, when he is dissatisfied with its conduct. He ought to depend entirely upon it, as well for the conservation of its gifts as for the gifts themselves.

28. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

The fourth reason is the example even of insensible creatures. Let us learn from hence, not, like these plants, to do nothing, but to trust to God's eye, and to commit ourselves to his almighty hand, which the least of his works discover and manifest unto us. He who makes the lilies of the field grow, cannot he augment our substance, if it be for his glory and our advantage? Nothing is more capable of increasing our confidence toward God, than to consider his works with attention, and to meditate upon his conduct.

29. And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

Christ confounds, at one and the same time, both the luxury of the rich in their superfluities, and the distrust of the poor as to the necessaries of life. Let man, who is made for heaven and eternity, learn from a flower of the field, from a flower of a moment's duration, how low the care of Providence vouchsafes to stoop. All our disquiets and distrusts proceed from want of faith. A man is rich when he has faith; that supplies all wants. The poor are not really so, unless destitute of faith.

31. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32. (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:)

The fifth reason is, that to concern ourselves about these wants with anxiety, as if there was no such thing as providence in the world; with great affection toward earthly enjoyments, as if we expected no other; and, without praying to God or consulting his will, as if we could do any thing without him: this is no better than to imitate the heathens.

For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

The sixth reason is, because God is a good father, who

knows all our wants. It is the property of a true father to provide necessaries, and not superfluities. Not to hope for the former, is to offend his goodness; to expect the latter, is to do injury to his wisdom. The want of what is necessary is that which generally casts men into uneasiness about the future; and yet it is this very thing which ought to make them easy; because this is properly the business of providence, and the care of a father.

33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The seventh reason is, because the business of our salvation ought entirely to take us up. Hither all our desires, our cares, and our inquiries ought to tend. He who first seeks God, finds him together with all these things; the righteous are never deprived of them, but only in order to their finding God more certainly, readily, and fully. He who has all his spiritual wants supplied by God himself, though he were left under the greatest wants and necessities of the body, would yet be far from complaining that God had broken his word. Grant, Lord, that I may desire and seek nothing but thee, and that I may live only for thee, and in thee.

34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.

The eighth and last reason is, that a solicitous carefulness renders us unhappy beforehand. The future falls under the cognizance of God alone; we encroach therefore upon his rights, when we would fain foresee all which may happen to us, and secure ourselves from it by our cares. How much good is omitted, how many evils caused, how many duties neglected, how many innocent persons deserted, how many good works destroyed, how many truths suppressed, and how many acts of injustice authorized, by these timorous forecasts of what may happen, and these faithless apprehensions concerning the time to come! Let us do in season what God then requires of us; and let us trust to him for the consequences. The future time, which God would have us foresee and provide for, is that of judgment and eternity; and it is this alone which we will not foresee.

CHAPTER VII.

SECT. I.—NOT TO JUDGE.—NOT TO CAST HOLY THINGS TO DOGS.

1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.

God reserves to himself the judgment of the heart of man. Nothing so much incenses a judge against a criminal, as to see him set up himself for a judge. We search into the heart of our neighbour to discover something for which we may condemn him, either out of an idle curiosity, or out of envy and malice, or in order to find our own justification in the condemnation of others; this is what a great part of the world do almost without perceiving it.

2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

We believe it, because Christ has said it, that we shall be treated at the last judgment as we shall have treated others; and yet we act every day as if we did not believe it. He who shows mercy shall receive it. This severity which is just, considerate, and proportioned to our sins, is the punishment of the unjust, rash, and excessive rigour of the greatest part of our judgments.

3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

On one side, self-love blinds us as to ourselves; and on the other, envy and malice give us piercing eyes in respect of others. An excellent remedy against this forwardness in censuring the conduct of others, is to consider ourselves before we find fault with them. When we shall have as much zeal to correct ourselves as we have inclination to correct others, we shall then know our own defects better than we now do those of our neighbours.

4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye: and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye?

A false, blind, and irregular charity inspires us with a

malicious attention and application to the faults of others, and with an extreme sloth and negligence in regard of our own conduct. Give us, Lord, that true charity, which teaches, not to flatter ourselves, to spare our neighbour, and to judge equitably of every thing.

5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

The necessary order of action is to labour first about our own sanctification, before we apply ourselves to that of others; for else it is nothing but pride and hypocrisy. A blind, precipitate, and ungoverned zeal is good for nothing but to puff us up, to darken our understanding more and more with respect to ourselves, and to make us commit very great faults with respect to others. What is it to cast the beam out of our eye before we undertake to exercise the ministry of salvation, but to purify our heart from every human aim and irregular intention, to mortify our passions which are the causes of our blindness, to enlighten our faith by studying the way of salvation and the rules of the church, and to lay aside all false prejudices or popular prepossessions which are contrary to true piety?

6. ¶ Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

It is an express command of the Lord, not to expose the truths, mysteries, or sacraments of the church to the contempt and profanation of sinners; and yet this is what is now-a-days charged as a crime on those who endeavour to observe it. That is often represented as party management and confederacy, or as dangerous dissimulation, which is really the necessary wisdom and discretion of not dispensing the truth to those who are fit for nothing but to bark at it like dogs, to trample it under their feet like swine, and to rend or persecute those who deliver it to them. Sacraments are not for such as are continually returning, like dogs, to their former sins, particularly those which proceed from the tongue and the mouth; nor for such as remain, like swine, under habits of impurity, or of any other sins.

THE MEANS TO ARRIVE AT PERFECTION.

SECT. II.—1. MEANS—PRAYER.

7. ¶ Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

How rich is a man when he knows how to ask, to seek, and to knock as he ought; with his tongue, his desires, and his works! Let us ask, with confidence and humility; let us seek, with care and application; let us knock, with earnestness and perseverance. Grant me, Lord, a faith, which may make me thoroughly sensible of my needs, and humbly ask thy grace; a hope, which may excite me to seek thy kingdom only, and the righteousness which leads thereto; and a charity, which may urge me to knock incessantly and respectfully at the gate of thy mercy.

8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Prayer is always heard after one manner or another, when charity asks, seeks, and knocks. She alone obtains all which she asks, because she alone asks what she ought, and that in a right manner, and for a good end. The way never to be refused is, never to desire any thing but the will of God.

9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

We have no right to ask any thing of God, but only, (1.) Under the quality of children, and as members of his Son. (2.) With the heart of children, or a filial love. (3.) Necessaries, as bread. Thou art, O my God, both the Father and the bread of our souls. Give thyself to us, thee and thy Son Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. How many times, Lord, have we asked of thee a stone, namely, the good things of the earth, which would only have formed in us a heart of stone, and thou hast been pleased to give us the bread of thy grace, of thy word, and of thy Son!

10. Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

Jesus Christ may be said to be hidden in the Scriptures, as a fish is hidden in the water; faith and charity find him

there; curiosity and concupiscence, instead of him, find there sometimes the serpent and his temptation. If he is an unnatural father who gives his children things hurtful to the life of the body, what then is that person who causes them to lose the life both of soul and body to all eternity, in poisoning them with the maxims of the world, and in giving them the serpent of ambition, either by bad example or otherwise! Thou alone, O my God, art always a Father! and never givest to thy children any other than the gifts of a Father. Let me likewise always show myself a good child in prayer, and never ask any thing but what is worthy of thy paternal love!

11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Good gifts are always given to children who ask them well. What other good things but those of heaven should a Christian ask of his heavenly Father?—a Christian, who was made such only for heaven! To ask them amiss, is not so properly to ask them, as to render ourselves unworthy of them. They are given only to those who ask them; and we ask them, so far as we esteem and desire them. Show, O my God, that thou art our Father! and make us esteem, desire, and ask that only which thou art willing to give!

SECT. III.—2. MEANS—CHARITY.

12. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

The Scriptures contain nothing but charity, which is the substance and the end of them. How rare is this spirit of equity! and how difficult and painful is it even to good men, to walk exactly according to this rule! Self-love is too much confined within these bounds; it always finds out reasons of preference and distinction. Thy charity alone, O Jesus, can enable us to observe this law of charity!

SECT. IV.—3. MEANS—THE STRAIT WAY.

13. ¶ Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Unhappy those, who either flatter, or suffer themselves to

be flattered, on this subject! There are four things which show that a man is in the way to heaven:—The first, when he loves the gospel, which confines nature, reduces it to what is strictly necessary, obliges it even not to be too intent on that, and separates it from every thing which flatters or corrupts it. The second, when he does not envy those who enjoy all the comforts, and all the good things of this present life which they desire. The third, when he declines the way that everybody is too apt to like, "the broad way that leadeth to destruction." The fourth, when he earnestly endeavours to "enter in at the strait gate."

14. Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

To live as the generality of mankind do, is not to take "the way which leadeth unto life." He who teaches that the gate and way to life are wide and broad, when Jesus Christ wonders to see them so strait and narrow, can be no other than a deceiver. Few find the way of heaven, fewer enter into this way, fewer yet abide in it, fewer still walk in it, and fewest of all persevere, or go forward to the end. As it is thy grace only, O Lord, which causes us to find it, so from that we expect all the rest.

SECT. V.—FALSE PROPHETS.—THE FRUIT LIKE THE TREE.

15. ¶ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Adherence to the doctrine of the true pastors is one mark that a man is of the number of the true sheep. This advice of Christ, and the difficulty of discerning a sheep in her own natural clothing, from a wolf concealed under that of a sheep, show plainly how difficult the choice is of a good director, (of the conscience.) Those who come to you, and are no pastors, instead of leaving you to come to them, are from thence justly suspected to be wolves, who seek not so much to help you to heavenly treasures, as to rob you of earthly. What is the reason that so few find the way to life, unless it be because there are so few who have any distrust of false prophets, or loose directors, (of the conscience,) or who are not glad to

follow those who make the way very broad? He who really seeks God, will not trust himself to a guide without being assured that he can conduct him to him. The pure and upright heart is attentive; and this attention, joined with prayer, obtains the grace of discernment.

16. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

The works are the tongue of the heart. When the whole body of actions is bad, the heart must necessarily be corrupt. Hypocrites may deceive for a time, and conceal their heart on many occasions; but they cannot do it on all, or always. A man has not the Spirit of God in the least, when he does nothing but the works of the flesh: such as ambition, covetousness, and the like. Whoever enriches himself by the direction of conscience, and makes it subservient to the advancement of his family or his friends, or to other passions, he plainly enough discovers by his works, both what he is and what he is not.

17. Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

Such as is the will, such are the actions which proceed from it. One important rule to keep us from delusion is, to judge of ourselves, not by barren desires, nor by deceitful transports of devotion, but by our good works. The good tree is the good heart; the good fruit is a good life. The heart is God's, and truly Christian, when the life is so; the heart is the world's, when a man lives like the world. It is thou, O my God, who pluckest up the corrupt heart, and who createst, plantest, cultivatest, waterest, and makest the good one fruitful! Mine is in thy hands; make it a good tree; make it thy own plant!

18. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Charity is the root of the good tree, and that which renders it good; so long as that subsists, there can be no evil fruit of crimes; so long as it does not, there can be no good fruit of righteousness. To teach that righteousness is consistent with

the greatest crimes, is really to make a good tree bring forth evil fruit, and to give the lie to the Son of God.

19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

There can be no true piety nor salvation without good works. What greater misery, then, can a man have, than to be found before the tribunal of God without the root of charity, and the fruit of good works! Let us make haste, for the time is short, and the last moment perhaps at hand! To be forever separated from God and Christ, and to suffer eternally the torment of fire! O God, who can think of it without horror! But whoever does no more than barely think of it with horror, will be but the more inexcusable on that account. The only means to avoid this separation and eternal fire, is to separate ourselves from sin, and the occasions of it, and to purify ourselves in the fire of repentance.

20. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

This truth is often repeated, because our eternal state depends upon it. Not to have *good* fruit, is to have *evil;* there can be no innocent sterility in the invisible tree of the heart; to "bring forth nothing," is cause sufficient to be "hewn down, and cast into the fire." One main source of the evils of the church is the neglect of this rule, though given by Jesus Christ himself. The best fruits are frequently counted as nothing, and the trees which are most loaded with them are condemned, upon the word of those who have not the least good fruit themselves, or who bear nothing but evil. When the proper use is made of this rule of our Lord's, it will soon be discovered who are the good trees.

SECT. VI.—GOD JUDGES NOT BY WORDS, BUT BY WORKS.

21. ¶ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

That man condemns himself, who calls God his Lord, and yet testifies by his works that he does not fear him. God considers actions, and not words; fruit, and not leaves. The false and deceitful devotion which consists only in words, is

rejected by Jesus Christ. That alone which is true, substantial, and necessary, consists in studying and doing what God requires of us. How can the world be saved?—the world, which is intent on nothing but doing either its own will, to please itself, or that of others, out of interest! The will of God, which alone can sanctify and save, is regarded by it as nothing.

22. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

The most shining actions of the reprobate are often such as are rejected by God with the greater indignation, because the principle of them is more corrupt, and the end more criminal. How many preachers are there, who appear prophets in the pulpit; how many (spiritual) guides; how many writers and other evangelical workmen, whose conduct, doctrine, and labour we admire; who yet are really nothing, and even less than nothing, before God, because they do not perform his will! It is better to be and to do nothing, than to be or do what God would not have us.

23. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Dreadful separation indeed, which we do not enough consider! How dear will the vain pleasure of sin, of worldly splendour, of a transient reputation, cost those who forget God! Grant, O Lord, that I may discover and avoid all those snares which are laid for us by the devil, the world, and our own self-love!—that so thou mayest know and accept me in that great day. Terrible alteration for those among the clergy, who are so eager to be known in the world, and to make their fortune in it, by the functions of the sacred ministry! Christ knows them not; whereby is meant, that he regards and treats them as he does the world, to which they have given themselves up, and for which he has not vouchsafed to pray; and that he strikes them, as well as the world, with this eternal anathema, "Depart from me!"

24. ¶ Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

We must build upon the rock, which is Jesus Christ, doing

that good by charity which we know by faith. True wisdom consists in working on the building of our salvation, in making it firm by keeping close to the word and the maxims of the gospel, and in conforming our lives thereto. And when, in order to this, we lean upon nothing but the grace of Christ, we then build upon a solid rock.

25. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

It is the practice of God's commandments which renders our calling and election sure, and which secures our salvation against the divine wrath and the last judgment. There are three kinds of trials and temptations: (1.) Those of temporal afflictions, which come from above, like the rain. (2.) Those which proceed from the lusts and passions of men, which are like floods. (3.) Those which, like impetuous winds, arise from the devil. It is charity, and not the light of faith alone, which can enable us to stand our ground against so many temptations and trials.

26. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

He who knows and does not, builds upon the sand, and is a fool. How many fools on earth pass for the men of true wisdom! And very often he who pities them, is himself of the number! It is a great misfortune not to know the gospel; but it is a real folly, to be filled with the knowledge of its truths, and to make no use at all of them. Render us faithful in this matter, O Eternal Wisdom! and give us that wisdom which consists in knowing how to be saved!

27. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

This is a lively representation of the case of a soul, which, at the hour of death, has nothing to rest upon. The knowledge of the law alone cannot support a soul against temptations, nor against the judgment of God; it will serve only to overwhelm it the more. The fall of the soul is irreparable, and without remedy, after this life; because the spring of charity will be then dried up, which alone can shelter the soul

from the rain of God's justice, stop the floods of his anger, and withstand the wind of his judgment, which will carry away the straw and the sand. Let us strengthen and secure our building, while we have time to do it.

28. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

These people will condemn the insensibility of our hearts at the word of Christ. They perhaps heard it but once, and we hear or read it every day. It is something to admire the beauty and holiness of the Christian morality; but to make us love and embrace it, is the work of Him alone who can change the heart.

29. For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.

Observe here the difference of Christ, and those who preach by his Spirit, from those who do it out of vanity, and by the spirit of the world. The word does nothing in the minister, without the unction with which God accompanies it. This does all, even in the mouth of him who is himself the Anointed of God. Lord, exercise upon my heart this sovereign power; instruct it with all the authority of thy divine person, and with all the efficacy of thy Spirit. Make it bear the yoke of thy gospel with affection, and let this excellent abridgment of thy doctrine be always the rule of my manners, and the pattern of my behaviour.

CHAPTER VIII.

SECT. I.—THE LEPER.

1. When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

A preacher or pastor ought never to decline from the perfection of his state; and yet he must often stoop, by way of condescension, to the weak and feeble; he must go to them, if they cannot come to him; and he must descend to their wants, their troubles, and their infirmities. It is the means

to gain them to God, to engage them to follow him, and to draw them after him by the sweet savour of the word.

2. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

This leper is an emblem of the corruption of man by sin, and of his restitution by repentance. A sinner truly penitent, seeks God with a respectful faith, approaches him in the spirit of adoration, humbles himself under his almighty hand, and acknowledges the greatness of his fall, and the vileness of sin, by an extreme humiliation of heart. His prayer is humble, plain, and full of confidence in God, who can do all things, and of dependence upon his will, which owes him nothing. It is peculiar to God alone, that he need only *will* what he intends to *perform*. His power is his will; it is because he wills it, that thereby he effects all, both in nature and in grace. These two truths are the fountain of Christian humility, the foundation of continual prayer, and the pledge of the mercy of God, to those whose hearts he has been pleased to instruct and penetrate with them.

3. And Jesus put forth *his* hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

This action of Jesus Christ is a representation of that invisible hand, which makes itself felt by the most insensible hearts; of that internal word, which makes itself heard by the most deaf; and of that supreme will, which makes itself obeyed by the most rebellious. There are two sorts of grace: the one, which does not work a conversion, but which prepares the heart for it, by working faith, desires, trust, prayer; and which causes the leper to say, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!"—the other, which does really work the conversion itself, by surmounting all the resistance of the sinner, and inspiring him with a good, strong, full, and perfect will, which entirely heals concupiscence, the very thing in which a bad will does consist. Say to me this word of salvation, "Be thou clean," O sovereign Physician, who dependest not on time for the cure of the maladies of my heart! We ought to be so far from despising the greatest sinners, that it is our duty to apply to them, but still as Christ did, not permitting

ourselves to be infected by them. Let us admire the efficacy of prayer; and let us put more trust and confidence in it for the future.

4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

Observe here the conduct of a good director (of the conscience:) (1.) Not to suffer the good which God is pleased to do by his ministry to be divulged, but to shun the reputation of good works. (2.) To be unconcerned for his own interest, and zealous for that of God. (3.) To prevent all occasion of scandal and jealousy. Priests ought not to treat sinners as cured of the leprosy of sin, until they are assured of it by sufficient proofs; as the priests of the law could not accept the offering of a leper, nor allow him to partake of the sacrifice, until they had received convincing tokens of his cleanness.

SECT. II.—THE CENTURION.

5. ¶ And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, 6. And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

God very often grants more than is desired. The eloquence of prayer consists in representing our wants to God in a plain manner. The centurion is the pattern of a true Christian master's charity toward his servants, who retains those who are the most incapable of doing him any more service, and is to them instead of a father. The inability to do good without the grace of Christ, is the palsy of the soul. Whence comes it to pass, that men are not near so much concerned at this spiritual palsy, as at that of the body, and that they complain of it so little? Is it not because their faith is small, and the business of salvation so little at their heart?

7. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

The word and promise of Christ is the great consolation of a sinner. There is no person in the world but what has need that Jesus Christ should come and heal him, either of his mortal wounds, or of his weakness and infirmities. From the time that he has made us sensible of our diseases, and given

us the grace to lay them before him in prayer, let us confidently believe, that he says to us, "I will come and heal you;" and let us faithfully and humbly say to him, without ceasing, "Come, Lord Jesus."

8. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

See here the pattern of a lively faith, and a profound humility, which ought always to accompany the prayer of a sinner. Jesus Christ, by his will alone, can heal the palsy of ours. The first degree of humility is to acknowledge the necessity of grace, and our own inability. The second, to confess the freeness of this grace, and our own unworthiness. Nothing more retards our cure than our presumption.

9. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*.

This is to make a true Christian use of authority, by it to raise our minds to the contemplation of that of God. Let us look upon ours as a small emanation of his; and let us acknowledge, that it is nothing in comparison of his almightiness. Carnal men are apt to idolize either the authority of others, out of flattery or interest, or their own through pride or conceit; but a Christian takes occasion from hence to humble himself, to adhere to God, and to hope for every thing from him.

10. When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

We sometimes see laymen and military persons, on whom God seems to have bestowed fewer favours than on others, have notwithstanding greater faith than they. Humility is, at the same time, both the mother and the daughter of faith. Jesus admires the works of his Father, to whom he refers all, and chiefly the operation of his grace in the soul, to induce us to admire them also, and to give glory to God for all. There are two things which are the subject of Christ's wonder: the first, how few find the way to heaven by reason of its perfection, (Matt. vii. 14;) the second, how incomprehensible the

election of those is, on whom God confers the free gift of faith. There is nothing greater, nothing more worthy of the attention of a Christian than faith, and the works of it in the saints.

11. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven:

Oftentimes he who seems to be lost, enters into the same place with him who led a pious life. We must fear and hope to the end. Christ proclaims and foretells the conversion of remote nations, to the end that we may ask it of God. To pray often for the advancement of his kingdom, and for the propagation of the faith, is one of the duties of a true Christian. All the elect are the children of promise, and are admitted into fellowship with the patriarchs, and into their rights and privileges; because it is to them that the promises were made. Let us imitate Abraham in his faith, Isaac in his obedience even unto death, and Jacob in his hope and expectation of good things to come, amidst all the evils of this life, if we desire to reign with them.

12. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

How many Christians suffer the graces, the kingdom, and the salvation, which they had as it were in their hands, to be lost; while Pagans and Idolators obtain salvation! An eternity of darkness, tears, and pains, for one moment of sinful pleasure. What blindness is it to expose ourselves thereto!

13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, *so* be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

The faith given by God is the fountain and measure of his other gifts. To beg the increase of it, is to beg many other graces, and to preserve those which we have already. The faith to which Jesus grants all which it desires, is not a naked and barren faith, but one which produces trust, humility, and prayer.

SECT. III.—PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW.—THE POSSESSED AND SICK CURED.

14. ¶ And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.

As the miracle of the leper represents the corruption of nature by original sin, and the restitution of it by Christian grace; as that of the paralytic expresses our inability to do good, and to resist evil, without actual grace; so this third miracle denotes the concupiscence which still remains, and which, like a fever, is the cause of many frailties and infirmities. Behold them, O Lord, in me, with the same eyes of mercy which thou wast pleased to cast upon this woman!

15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.

Christ, in touching the hand of this woman, shows plainly the quickening virtue of his flesh, united to the divinity in unity of person. This flesh, so often received (spiritually) in the communion, what ought it not to work in our hearts! When God touches the heart with his grace, he destroys the heat of concupiscence therein. We must, after the example of this woman, be so faithful, as to consecrate and return to God the whole use of his gifts and graces. It is by works that a man proves himself to be cured of his evil habits. The humility and charity which are shown by serving Christ in the poor, are some of the surest marks of a true conversion.

16. ¶ When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with *his* word, and healed all that were sick:

O my God, make the sinner thoroughly sensible that he falls into the power of the devil when he refuses to have thee for his Lord and Master. The possessed with devils are not to be seen without horror; but what is this possession, if compared to that of the soul, and beheld with the eyes of faith? How terrible to the devil is the word of Jesus Christ! Let us with faith and confidence employ it against his temptations. Let us bless God for having left this word to his church to be the scourge of the devil. It is Christian pru-

dence, by constant reading, to fill our heart therewith, to the end that the devil may always meet there with this safeguard and defence. That which the word of God, in the mouth of Christ performs in a moment, it performs by degrees in the sinner who feeds upon it. Oh the goodness of Christ, not to reject any sick person! Oh wonderful power, to heal them all! Let none therefore despair under the sight and sense of their miseries.

17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esais the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare *our* sicknesses.

We see here the immense charity of the good Shepherd. To bear the infirmities and frailties of our brethren, is to imitate him. We cannot indeed cure sicknesses; but we can assist, relieve, serve, visit, and comfort the sick. We take upon us their infirmities, when we compassionate them by charity. Christ fulfils the prophecies in all respects, and is himself the completion and truth of them, as being the Lamb and Victim of God which bears and takes away the sins of the world. He alone is the universal Physician for all the diseases of body and soul. I do not ask, O Lord, to be exempt from the former, because thou makest them remedies for the distempers of the latter; these are they which call upon thee, which wait for thee, and which are incurable to all beside.

SECT. IV.—CHRIST IS TO BE FOLLOWED IN HIS STATE OF POVERTY.

18. ¶ Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

A man ought (frequently) to withdraw himself from the world, though his piety be ever so much proof against temptation. A pastor, how necessary soever he may be to his people, ought to retire from them for a while, when he finds the crowd and noise of the world prejudicial to his soul.

19. And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

The presumptuous person fancies himself capable of every thing. As to ordinary duties, the call of the gospel is sufficient; as to designs of perfection, we must wait until God

calls us. To anticipate the call of God, is to prevent his grace; and miserable is he who pretends to walk without it. It is not sufficient that the desires be good; they must also be regular.

20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head.

It is very just and reasonable, to worship Christ even under this destitution of all the conveniencies of life; to undergo the want of some of them, thereby to honour and imitate him, and to beg of him the spirit and the grace to do it. What poor man is not comforted, when he casts his eyes upon this adorable pattern! What rich man is not confounded, when he sees himself so unlike, and at such a distance from it! What shame must those nice and delicate persons hence receive, who are always ill at ease, and who exhaust their wit in daily inventing some new gratifications! Let us adore the Son of God, debased so low as to take upon him human nature in the incarnation, and in some manner more destitute of the conveniences of life than the very beasts themselves. Whoever designs to follow Christ, in order to make his fortune in the world, does not seek him, but the world and its fortune. A man must disengage himself from every thing, if he would truly serve God, by following Jesus Christ in the sacred ministry, or otherwise.

21. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

The voice of God must be obeyed without delay. The children of Adam are always in extremes: either they will anticipate God, like this scribe, (v. 19,) or they will not follow him immediately, like this disciple. The mean between both, is to wait until he speaks; and not to defer following him one moment when he has spoken. Men never want pious pretences, when they have neither resolution enough to enter into the way which God points out, nor humility enough to acknowledge their own weakness.

22. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

How difficult is it to forsake the world! Always some

secular tie retains those whom God calls to retirement. All human respects, all regard to the duties of civil life, must be laid aside, when our salvation is in question. All other care may be supplied by some other person; the care of saving our soul, is our own personal affair. A man is dead when he lives not according to faith, which is the life of the soul. He who is called to follow Christ in the way of perfection, ought to fear the world, and the conversation of worldly people, as much as we generally fear the apparition of a dead man, or the infection of a burying-place.

SECT. V.—THE TEMPEST APPEASED.

23. ¶ And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

This ship in the midst of the sea, is an emblem of the church in the midst of the world. Jesus is there with his disciples: this is our comfort. Whoever has this truth present to his mind, looks upon every thing which happens in the church with other eyes than those of the world.

24. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

We ought to expect to meet with tempests in the church, and to see it covered with waves. Let us not be scandalized at it, but let us arm ourselves with faith and patience. Every one has likewise his storms and tempests. When our faith grows dull and heavy, then Christ is asleep in us. He is asleep in respect of us, when he leaves us some time to ourselves, and makes us know the want of him by permitting us to fall either under temptation, or inward troubles, or outward persecution of carnal men, or into coldness, difficulties, and disgust in the service of God.

25. And his disciples came to *him*, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

The advantage of temptation is to make us know our weakness, so as to oblige us to have recourse to God, and to unite ourselves to Jesus Christ. We approach him by faith, we are united to him by charity, and we awake him by prayer. All good perishes, or at least decays in us without Christ. There is not so much as one moment, wherein we are not in danger

of perishing without our Saviour's grace. How proper is this short prayer for us, and how familiar should it be to us, because our Saviour's grace is necessary every moment! It comprehends all the power of our Lord's grace, the abundance of our Saviour's merits, and the depth of the sinner's miseries.

26. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

Faith is courageous, incredulity fearful. A person truly faithful retains his confidence in the most violent temptations. One word alone of God, restores a perfect calm to souls troubled by temptation. Prayer, though imperfect, is very often heard: (1.) That our imperfections may not hinder us from praying to God. (2.) That we may be persuaded that our merits do not make our prayers effectual. (3.) That we may offer them up with great humility. (4.) That we may unite ourselves to Christ in praying together with him. This defect of faith in Christ's disciples consisted in their not having that idea of his power which they ought. Let us fear the same defect, and let us learn of how much use it is, in order to pray well, to have such a notion of grace as is suitable to the omnipotence of that God whom we adore. Great tempest, great calm; God proportions the comfort to the affliction.

27. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

Insensible creatures hear the Creator's voice, and obey it; man alone is deaf and disobedient thereto. God, who makes himself obeyed by them, can he have less command over our heart, when he resolves to subject it to himself? This is the consolation of those who suffer, that he can make himself obeyed in a moment, and restore peace to souls, and to the church. Let us only awake our faith, and pray.

SECT. VI.—THE DEVILS CAST OUT—THE SWINE DROWNED.

28. ¶ And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.

That which passes in these two possessed persons, is a lively

representation of the fury of the devil possessing a sinner's soul, of the misery of the sinner whom he possesses, and of the evils which sin causes in the world. A guilty conscience is a real tomb, wherein a possessed person lodges, and where stench and darkness reign. Happy that person, whom the approach of Jesus Christ causes to come out and meet him!

29. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

The first motions of conversion do but trouble and torment the sinner. Men shut their eyes against the light, they thrust back the hand of Christ, they say it is not yet time, they are incensed against the truths of faith, and against those who set them before their eyes and show Jesus Christ unto them. There is no communication between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world; we must renounce either the one or the other.

30. And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding.

See here another representation of sinners, of those chiefly who are subject to impurity by habit, or by frequent relapses. They are still farther off from salvation than other sinners, are to be found in greater numbers, and are more addicted to please their appetite. Make them know, O Lord, the shamefulness of their condition, and what it is to have changed thy image into that of a swine.

31. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.

The sinner thinks he has injustice done him, when he is restrained from hurting his neighbour. He will not see the end of his sins. He imitates the devil, and does what lies in his power to be at no loss as to wickedness, by never leaving one sin but for another. Since the devil can do nothing but by God's permission, and as the executioner of his justice, it is this adorable justice which he ought to fear, and more yet sin, without which justice is inactive.

32. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran

violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. 33. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.

God hears not the devil and certain sinners, but only so far as he hears his own justice. Here is an emblem of the final impenitence into which the habitually impure more commonly fall than other sinners. Christ permits the devils to do that in the swine which he did not permit them to do in the possessed, on purpose to show us what rage they would exercise upon us if God left them at liberty. How many are the divine favours and benefits, which we do not consider, and which we know only in general! God looks upon temporal riches as of little or no value. He suffers them to be lost, sometimes to disengage us from them out of mercy, sometimes out of justice, to punish us for having acquired or preserved them either by covetousness or injustice.

34. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought *him* that he would depart out of their coasts.

The wicked choose rather to lose Jesus Christ, than their temporal goods and the objects of their lusts. Blind and ungrateful wretches, who cannot discern the time and the grace of this visitation of the Lord! There are but too many, whom the fear of some loss, disgrace, or reproach, blinds and intimidates so far as to make them ashamed of Christ, his gospel, his truth, and his servants. Continue with us, O Lord! for thou art all things to us, and art alone sufficient for us.

CHAPTER IX.

SECT. I.—THE PARALYTIC HEALED.

1. And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

Wo to those whom God hears as he heard the Gergesenes, abandoning them to their own desires, and to temporal felicity, according to their wishes! Miserable condition: to imagine we can be happy when Jesus Christ departs from us, or with-

draws his light, and his ministers, because they disturbed our false repose and our passions.

2. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

The paralytic is an emblem of the total inability into which sin has cast us, and of which Jesus Christ alone can heal us. Faith, charity, and the prayers of the church, obtain from him our cure. See here the confidence which a sinner should have. Christ goes to the source of the evil which is sin; and to that we ought also to run back in all our maladies. It is probable that this pious sick man did, by his desires, beg the cure of his soul, leaving the care of his body to others, since Christ heals the soul before the body. Few are there who imitate him. When we seek, before all things, to please God by our piety, he inspires others with the care of our temporal necessities.

3. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This *man* blasphemeth.

The learned who are proud and conceited, are also blind, unbelieving, slanderers, envious, and obdurate. They call good evil, and abuse and pervert every thing. Christ has no manner of regard to the offence taken by a Pharisee, which he knew would happen. He does the good, though he foresees the abuse of it. Let us also not omit works of charity or justice, on the account of the evil disposition of the pretenders to devotion, the openly profane, or of men of corrupt knowledge. Light serves only to blind and lead men out of the way, when it is not joined with uprightness of heart. The most sacred truths become often an occasion of delusion, where men are under the government of their passions.

4. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

The meekness of Jesus Christ shows itself on all occasions in his conduct and behaviour. He sounds the secrets of every heart. No sin escapes his knowledge. How senseless is the sinner, to think he sins securely when unseen by men! Let us fear that Judge who sees the bottom of the heart better

than we do ourselves. If we put this question to ourselves concerning all our thoughts, how many of them should we find unjust, rash, foolish, unfit for God to behold, and unserviceable to any good purpose. Let us watch over our mind; and, by judging and correcting ourselves, let us prevent the judgment and manifestation thereof which God will one day make.

5. For whether is easier, to say, *Thy* sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?

External miracles are proofs of internal, and of invisible effects. Every thing is equally easy to him who can do every thing by the sole act of his will; but extraordinary and miraculous effects are the necessary proof of an extraordinary mission, and of that authority which a man takes upon himself as coming from God.

6. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

That man's sins are forgiven him who is converted; and the proof of his conversion is to imitate this paralytic healed of his distemper. He who cannot rise and stand upright, but either continues grovelling on the earth, or falls back as soon as he gets up, is not yet cured of his spiritual palsy. The sinner's bed is every thing which he loves, and in which he finds his rest and satisfaction upon earth, his criminal inclinations, and the objects of his passions; a true conversion takes up and carries away every thing of this nature. When we see a penitent walk in the way of the commandments, enter into his own heart, there to rest in the enjoyment of his God, and not go out thence any more to run after the creatures, we may then conclude that his conversion is perfect.

7. And he arose, and departed to his house.

Thou art obeyed, Lord, the very moment in which thou commandest, because it is thou who workest what thou dost command. Speak after this manner to my heart, and it will then have motion and strength to raise itself toward thee, to go unto thee, and to rest in thee, who art the house and bed of its everlasting rest.

8. But when the multitudes saw *it*, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

That which to the doctors of the law is a matter of scandal, is to the humble an occasion of glorifying God. Divine things make a deeper impression upon the heart of the ignorant multitude, than on that of doctors puffed up with their own learning. How much more ought we to bless and glorify God, for so many invisible wonders which he works in the saints and in ourselves? The conversion of one heart, which is rebellious and paralytical as to all good, is more to be admired than all the miracles which God performs on inanimate creatures.

SECT. II.—MATTHEW CALLED.

9. ¶ And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

The call to conversion seems often a matter of chance; though it be really an effect of divine election. The whole happiness of a soul frequently depends on its being immediately obedient to the voice of God, and following his first call. What cannot the word of Christ, joined with grace, work on the heart? God, in calling all sorts of persons to faith and piety, makes it evident that he is the master both of the work and of the workmen. A profession which is very painful, excites and nourishes covetousness; and the management of the public money, increases the affection toward earthly riches; but what bonds dost thou not break, O my God, when thou designest to show mercy?

10. ¶ And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

It scarcely belongs to any but Christ to converse familiarly with the greatest sinners in order to convert them. We ought to decline the impulse of a false zeal, which often induces souls as yet weak to undertake this work; but we must not refuse to become instruments of Providence, in saving the most abandoned, when that engages us in it. The facility and goodness of Christ, in bearing with a company so oppo-

site to his own holiness, condemns the proud disdain of the great pretenders to devotion.

11. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?

The pretenders to devotion are envious and jealous of the care which any one takes of sinners. A good Christian must expect to see his best actions interpreted ill and condemned. Such a one follows the impulse of humility and charity, without regarding the discourses of the world. Envy is cowardly and timorous, and not daring to apply itself directly to the Master who would confound it, it endeavours to surprise the disciples, and to take advantage of their weakness.

12. But when Jesus heard *that*, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Jesus Christ comes to the assistance of the weak when they are attacked on his account. Here are four necessary instructions: (1.) That Jesus is the sovereign Physician of souls. (2.) That all stand in need of him. (3.) That we must acknowledge our own diseases, and the need we have of Christ, if we desire to be healed by him. (4.) That it is the greatest of all our maladies to think ourselves whole, this being in effect to renounce Jesus Christ. It belongs to thee, O Lord, both to make us sensible of our diseases and wants, and to oblige us to have recourse to thyself.

13. But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Nothing is more conducive to the instruction and humiliation of pretenders to devotion, and true Pharisees, than to show them that they understand neither Scripture nor religion, when, relying on external performances, they neglect charity, which is the very soul and substance of it. If this inward sacrifice accompany not the outward, the latter provokes God instead of appeasing him. It is an act of religion and a sacrifice, to assist the poor with regard to Christ as present in them. True holiness consists not in external things, but in faith animated and working by love. It is our great comfort, O Jesus, that thou art come to call sinners.

Call us, we beseech thee, to repentance; but do it with that strong and powerful voice which always makes itself heard.

SECT. III.—FASTING.—NEW CLOTH.—OLD VESSELS.

14. ¶ Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

Self-conceit and contempt of our neighbour do generally proceed from external mortifications. The humble man looks not on the life of his neighbour, but only in order to imitate the good which he observes therein. Good and well-meaning persons do sometimes unwarily fall in with the passions of Pharisees, and are misled by their calumnies. A secret jealousy between the disciples of different (masters) opens the heart to evil-speaking. Charity is the internal way wherein all ought to walk; but there are several external ways which lead to God; every one is to follow the path in which he has set him, without blaming that of others.

15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

The life of Jesus Christ on earth was a time of indulgence. The present life of Christians is a time of mourning and mortification. Every soul has its time of pleasure and consolation, and its time of exercise and trial; the one ought to be a preparation for the other. In the former, a man should fortify himself against the time of combat; in the latter, he should learn not to misemploy that of peace. Fasting includes all sorts of privations and pains. When God suffers the church to be persecuted, he thereby gives her to understand that she is a widow upon earth, and that she ought to mourn in expectation of the bridegroom who has been taken from her. Every Christian soul is really a widow and desolate, if by faith it becomes thoroughly sensible of the absence of its Lord, and earnestly desires his return.

16. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment; for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

Christian and pastoral prudence require, that the weak and

the newly-converted should be managed with care and tenderness. He does not flatter, but assist the sinner, who endeavours to inure and reconcile the old man by degrees to the yoke of Christ. It is a very great imprudence to neglect this conduct, so recommended here by the great director of souls. We take great care not to spoil the least trifle, which may be at all serviceable to us any longer, and we have often little or no regard to a soul, which is so precious in the sight of God, and created to serve him eternally. The wounds which we give it by a wrong and too precipitate a conduct are sometimes incurable.

17. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

To impose the yoke of such exercises and mortifications as are not absolutely necessary, before God has changed and renewed the heart, is no other than to endeavour to prevent his grace. Men sometimes cause a soul to lose that portion of grace which it had, by urging it too soon to engage in the ways of perfection, of which it is not as yet capable. Very auspicious beginnings, and great hopes of conversion, even as to a whole people, are often ruined by men proceeding too hastily, by their endeavouring to make their own designs take place, and to have the honour of that success themselves which is due only to God. It is a great degree of knowledge, to be able to observe and follow the motions of grace, on which all depends, and which commonly performs its work by degrees, and step by step, in the souls of particular persons, and almost always in a great people. Give, Lord, the Spirit of thy conduct to the ministers of thy work, that they may know how to manage and improve thy interests in the souls of men, without the least damage to them.

SECT. IV.—THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS RAISED.—THE BLOODY ISSUE HEALED.

18. ¶ While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.

There are four conditions of a good prayer: (1.) A man

ought to place himself in the presence of God, and to approach him by faith. (2.) To humble himself sincerely. (3.) To lay open his wants with a holy earnestness. (4.) To have confidence in the goodness of Christ, and in the virtue of his holy humanity, which is the source of all the holiness of Christians. The mysterious imposition of hands, used by Christ in bodily cures, represents the sovereign authority of Jesus Christ, the inward touches of his grace, the communication of his merits, and the effusion of his Spirit.

19. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and *so did* his disciples.

Jesus, though able to act as well absent as present, appears upon the place, to teach his ministers not to spare either their steps or their pains, when the salvation of a soul is in question. He rises up, to show them that they must quit their repose and ease, to go in search of souls which are dead in sin. When a pastor, praying earnestly for a soul, of which he is the father, calls Jesus Christ to his succour, he ought to hope that he will rise and follow him.

20. ¶ And behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind *him*, and touched the hem of his garment:

There is nothing in Christ but what is sanctifying. God sometimes makes little things instrumental to the cure of the most shameful and inveterate habits, to illustrate his grace, and to give confidence to sinners. This is a representation of the natural shame which persons have to discover sins of impurity; of the unworthiness of those who, before their being cleansed from them, approach holy things; and of the humility of a true penitent, who aspires only to "touch the hem of his garment," in reading his word, in meditating on the most humble part of his life and mysteries, and in imitating him by the mortifying exercises of repentance.

21. For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

Faith renders the meanest and weakest things efficacious, and full of virtue to us. Faith is so much the greater, as it is fixed on the less things. Nothing is more simple than that which composes the outward signs of the sacraments; and yet

there is nothing which contains greater remedies and richer treasures than the sacraments themselves.

22. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

Christ grants every thing to prayer made with faith and humility. God never fails to turn, and cast the eyes of his mercy upon a penitent, who, out of humility, dares not lift his eyes toward him. How much to blame is the sinner, to distrust the goodness of God, who comes to meet him with so much mildness, and who himself encourages him under his dejection! Let us firmly believe that we can do, and that we merit nothing; that God can do every thing for us and in us; and that he delights to exercise this power upon the most unworthy. Faith is that which a sinner must bring along with him to repentance and to prayer.

23. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,

How often, on the death of relations, do men encumber and perplex themselves with vain, worldly, tumultuous, and unprofitable ceremonies, instead of making in silence profitable reflections upon death! It is customary for the people of the world to seek for comfort in their grief only from diversions. What is a sinner, deprived of the life of God, whom the crowd of affairs, the noise of his passions, and the delusions of the world, hinder from thinking of his condition, but that very thing which we see here?

24. He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.

How happy is a sinner, when God himself takes care to remove from him all obstacles to the resurrection of his soul! It is apart, and in retirement, that one labours most profitably to this purpose, and that Christ applies himself thereto. Death is but a sleep, in respect of him who raises a dead person, more easily than we can awake one who is asleep. Even the death of the soul is but a sleep, when God has resolved to awaken the sinner, and to restore to him the life of his grace. The world laughs at the truths which it neither comprehends

nor loves, and at those who publish them. A faithful minister keeps on his pace, and ceases not to work the work of God.

25. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.

Christ and the world are incompatible in the same heart; the world must go out thence, if one would have Christ enter therein. The world is unworthy to be present at the works of God, and to know the operations of his grace. He who desires to rise from sin, ought to distrust the world, and not to discover himself to any but to Christ, or to his true disciples. If the helpful hand of Christ do not take hold of the sinner's, he will never rise. The living hand of our blessed Saviour, and the dead hand of the maid joined together, are an emblem of grace and of the will, which unite and concur inseparably to justification and good works, by the consent which grace works in the will, and which the will gives through grace, which revives it, sanctifies it, moves it, and makes it act.

26. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

The fame of the conversion of a soul diffuses itself in the church like a sweet odour. It is the duty of a minister to conceal himself; and that of a thankful soul to publish the mercy of God.

SECT. V.—TWO BLIND MEN RESTORED TO SIGHT.

27. ¶ And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, *Thou* Son of David, have mercy on us.

One good work draws on another. He who is raised by grace, is not thereby delivered from all his darkness,—God enlightens him afterward. That man is partly enlightened already, who knows that he has a Saviour who is full of mercy; that mercy is all which he must ask; that he must cry and pray with fervour; and that, in praying, he must follow him as God-man, and the son of David expected from heaven.

28. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.

God often delays to hear us, in order to exercise our patience, to augment our desire, to oblige us to approach Christ

the more, and to put our whole trust in him. In our blindness we ought, (1.) To have a lively belief of the almighty grace of Christ. (2.) To call upon him by an humble and ardent prayer, which is the cry of the heart. (3.) To have confidence in him, upon the account of his incarnation.

29. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.

The internal hand of Christ opens the eyes of the heart, by touching them with his grace. Faith, which is a gift of God, is the measure of his other gifts in us.

30. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See *that* no man know *it.*

The effect follows the will of Christ without delay. Touch my heart, O Jesus, that its eyes may open themselves to thy truth, and to the holiness of thy law. In eminent and remarkable works we must conceal ourselves, that we may avoid the reward of men, and not lose that which God reserves for us. Christ seems to be apprehensive of this reward of men as to himself, to this end, that we may really dread it as to ourselves.

31. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

Honour pursues those who fly it. He who is thoroughly sensible of God's mercy, cannot contain his acknowledgments. God permits not his saints to remain so concealed as they desire, because what he gives them for their own sanctification ought to be subservient also to that of others.

SECT. VI.—THE DUMB MAN POSSESSED.—THE BLASPHEMY OF THE PHARISEES.

32. ¶ As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.

The devil shuts up the mouth of those who belong to him, when he diverts them from prayer, confessions of their sins, and the praise of God. One of the most miserable conditions of sinners is, not to be able to express their misery.

33. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

Nothing is more wonderful to the eyes of faith than the

change of a soul by grace; but carnal eyes very often see nothing in it but what is contemptible. When charity is once entered into a heart, one may know it by its language. God receives the praise of his works from the mouth of ignorant people sooner than from that of the learned.

34. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

This is a consummate piece of malice, to attribute the works of God to the devil! Envy cannot suffer the approbation which is given to the virtue of others. It makes those whose hearts are possessed by this vice, speak the language of the devil. Calumny is but at a little distance from envy. All persons have not the envy of the Pharisees; but every one ought to fear having some degree of it, since every one has the principle.

SECT. VII.—THE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD.—THE HARVEST AND LABOURERS.

35. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

A true minister of Jesus Christ, after his example, is neither detained in one place by the sweetness of the applause of some, nor discouraged from his ministry by the jealousy and calumny of others. Wherever Christ exercises his mission, he makes the proofs of it evidently appear. He works none but salutary and beneficial miracles, because his ministry is a ministry of salvation. Bodily cures foretell that of the soul, and are instrumental thereto, because God makes them so.

36. ¶ But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Here is the pattern of a pastor who is indefatigable, and full of compassion for sinners. Let us view here the shadow of what we should be without the divine Shepherd of our souls; and let us never grow weary of praising God for having bestowed him upon us. Without him there is nothing but fainting and wandering.

37. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly *is* plenteous, but the labourers *are* few;

There is extreme want of labourers in the church. There are abundance who bear this character, but few who really work; and a great many who work in the Lord's name, but very few whom he will own for his ministers. Christ, by declaring the needs of the church, invites to labour all ecclesiastical persons who either live in idleness, or employ themselves about something quite different from that which they ought to do. If the wants of Europe are great, how much more those of other countries, where several provinces have only one minister! The place of the harvest is the whole earth. It signifies but little where a man works, provided it be by the appointment, in the Spirit, and with the blessing of God.

38. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

It is for God to send them, and for us to pray to him to do it. Jesus Christ requires for labourers, not such as confer upon themselves a mission, but who receive it from God; not such as by intrigues and human solicitations assume the office, but such as are the fruit of the church's prayers; not such as enter into the harvest, to make themselves the lords of it, but who labour only for the Lord of the harvest; not such as in the repose of an idle life enjoy the honour and temporal advantages of the ministry, but such as work hard, like daily labourers. We do not sufficiently comprehend how much it is our duty and interest to pray for the obtaining good bishops, good curates, holy preachers, full of zeal, knowledge, and disinterestedness. Let us not read this, without doing it with all the fervency of our faith.

CHAPTER X.

THE INSTRUCTION OF THE APOSTLES.

SECT. I.—THEIR NAMES.

1. And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

To call persons to the ecclesiastical ministry, belongs only to Him who can give power over the unclean spirit of sin, and over the diseases of the soul. There are three kinds of these diseases: (1.) Such as are caused by sins of impurity, which are the most obstinate, and like devils which possess the whole soul. (2.) Sins of habit, which are, as it were, lingering distempers. (3.) Sins of infirmity, which are the (lesser) faults of negligence and inclination.

2. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother;

God often unites by grace those whom he has before united by nature; to show us, that though nature be not a step toward grace, yet it is not always an obstacle thereto. St. Andrew, the elder brother of St. Peter, and who knew Jesus Christ before him, has not the honour to be named first, to teach us, that God is master of his own gifts, and that nothing but his will gives us a right to them.

James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3. Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the publican; James *the son* of Alpheus, and Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus; 4. Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Let us adore the unsearchable judgment of God, in the choice of a wicked minister, whose unworthiness he knew. Let us learn from hence, that no merit gives a right to the ministry, but the sole choice of God by the church. Christ would not put into the ministry none but saints, to oblige us not to judge of the church's holiness by some of her ministers. He would not place in it any of the rich, noble, powerful, or

learned; for fear men should affix ecclesiastical dignities to temporal advantages. Let us suffer the bad with patience; let us adore Christ, and his authority abased in them; yet so as that the [word and] sacraments lose not any of their effect thereby; and let us by this believe, that it is Jesus Christ who does all therein, even by the hands of the most unworthy workmen.

SECT. II.—THEIR MISSION, POWER, POVERTY, AND PREACHING.

5. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

Let us not go where inclination, but where God's command carries us. Vocation, mission, instruction, and holiness are four different gifts, which a man must receive from God by Jesus Christ, to qualify him for a worthy labourer. The very same instructions are given in common to all, in order to establish a uniformity of maxims, conduct, and discipline. Such as God seems at first to have neglected or rejected, are often those for whom he has designed his greatest mercies. He has his own proper time to discover and reveal them.

6. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

A good pastor ought to apply himself to the most diseased of his sheep; and the diseases are the greater, where there is the more ingratitude and abuse of the divine favours. God is faithful to his promises, even in respect of the most unworthy; but often, through the corruption of their heart, and contrary to his design, his faithfulness turns to their greater condemnation. Men sometimes look upon certain prerogatives and preferences as an honour, which are no other than a subject of fear and humiliation.

7. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

See here the first efforts of the apostles preaching. "Preach," to establish the faith; "the kingdom," to animate the hope; "of heaven," to inspire the love of heavenly things, and the contempt of earthly; "which is at hand," that men may prepare for it without delay. Every Christian ought frequently to repeat this to himself, and to live as continually expecting

this kingdom. He who, instead of desiring it, dreads its approach, has but little of the relish and spirit of it. Pour, Lord, the love of it into my heart, for thou alone canst do it.

8. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils:

The word of Christ, so efficacious as to give what it commands toward the removal of bodily diseases, can it be less so in the healing of spiritual? He gives them the power of working the same miracles with himself, to show us that they acted only in his name, and by virtue of it. Let us learn, in our good works, to join bodily relief to spiritual.

Freely ye have received, freely give.

A rule very necessary this, and of large extent,—that we must serve God and his church "freely." What a shame is it for a man to traffic with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, of which he is not the master, but the dispenser! It is a piece of theft, injustice, irreverence, and disobedience. A man may drive a trade, or traffic with them several ways; by pride and vanity, when he desires by them to gain esteem and applause; by avarice, when he makes use of them to enrich himself. Preachers, and spiritual guides, will never sufficiently comprehend how great disinterestedness Christ requires of them. How few are there whom a perfect disengagement from all manner of interest qualifies to say, that they "give freely!"

9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses;

An apostolical workman resigns himself to the divine Providence for the necessaries of life. If the ministers of Jesus Christ ought to be disengaged from their own wealth, how much more from that of others? What avails it for a man to have no gold in his purse, if he have it in his heart? It is the greatest blindness imaginable in a clergyman, to act quite contrary to this direction of Christ, in being chiefly solicitous about providing gold and silver. How many blind persons of this sort are there!

10. Nor scrip for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

Nothing should detain an evangelical workman; he ought always to be ready to set forward. The equipage of an

ambassador of Jesus Christ was (at first) only poverty; his provisions, his trust in the providence of God, and in the charity of the faithful. He who preaches the gospel, ought to make it known by his life. The maintenance of the clergy is a matter of justice and of divine right. He who labours in the church, not he who does nothing there, has a right to live of the church's revenue, but not therewith to support his luxury and his vanity.

11. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.

A priest ought to be very careful of his reputation; to lodge with persons of a regular life, and to avoid all suspicion of levity, or of loving good cheer and the conveniences of life. To receive and entertain workmen truly evangelical, is a favour of which everybody is not worthy.

12. And when ye come into a house, salute it. 13. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.

The peace of the gospel is that which charity and a good conscience give. This is to pay the master of the house largely beforehand—to pray for him, and to offer him peace; namely, the knowledge of Christ, the righteousness of the kingdom of God, and the grace of faith. A man is not worthy to receive this peace, till chosen by God, and prevented by his grace and mercy. The merit of a preacher of the gospel does not depend upon his success. The mortification of a repulse is a gain to a man of God. There is always great advantage to be made in the service of a master who requires nothing but a good will and obedience, and who bestows even that which he requires.

14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

Whoever, out of contempt or neglect, neither reads nor hears the word of God, and whoever does it without improving thereby, ought he not to fear a more terrible malediction? It is necessary that the world should know that we do not seek it for the sake of its riches; and that we would not have any conversation with it, but only in order to its salvation.

When it will no longer hear us speak of this, it is time for us to retire from it.

15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.

How great a crime is it not to receive, or to despise the truth! If men are thus treated for not having received the preachers of the gospel, what will it be to despise the gospel itself, to decry it, to preach the contrary, to hinder the preaching of it, to abuse those who do it as they ought, and to stop the fruit of it by calumnies?

SECT. III.—THE WISE SIMPLICITY.—BOLDNESS BEFORE MAGISTRATES.—THE HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKING IN US.

16. ¶ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

It is but a small thing for a labourer in the gospel to be prepared for the repulses of the world; he ought to look upon himself as a "sheep in the midst of wolves." Such a person must be a perfect lamb, that he may oppose nothing to the artifices and violence of the world but the simplicity and meekness of that creature. Where can we find those, now-a-days, who embrace ecclesiastical dignities only as a state of labour and suffering? That we may neither draw upon ourselves persecution by our imprudence, nor endeavour to avoid it against the divine command, and by ways contrary to the simplicity of the dove, it is necessary to join these two qualities, wisdom and simplicity, which nothing but the Spirit of God alone can unite in one soul.

17. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

Let us not trust or depend upon every one. Even the best friends are to be suspected, when the business is to consult whether a man shall show his weakness, together with them, to avoid the ill-treatment of carnal men, or expose himself to every thing that he may continue faithful to God. Christ conceals not from his disciples what they have to undergo in his service, because he will not deceive any one; and because

it belongs to Him to fortify the heart of man, and to render it invincible to all things.

18. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

This is matter of wonderful comfort and encouragement to such as are sent to preach or teach, that they can be assured that it is the cause of God and of Christ, which they have to maintain before the powers of the earth. God never forsakes him who takes his interests to heart. It is the duty of a preacher to declare the truth to kings, but with abundance of prudence. He who flatters them, makes himself an accomplice in their sins.

19. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

The Holy Spirit is in the heart, in the mind, and on the tongue of those who are to speak for Christ, and who belong to him. Neither surprise, nor defect of talent, nor even ignorance, can hurt the cause of God, when the heart is ready to defend it. This promise banishes all distrust and disquiet on dangerous occasions, but without encouraging sloth and negligence, and without dispensing with the obligation we are under, to prepare ourselves, by the meditation of Christian truths, by the study of the Holy Scriptures, and by prayer. A promise so positive would more frequently have its effect, if the incredulity of man did not oppose it.

20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

The Holy Spirit animates the confessors of Christ, and makes them speak. The Head speaks in his members by his Spirit. It belongs to the Spirit of God to speak for God. It is the Spirit of the Father which speaks, because he works powerfully in the heart of his children, puts into their mouth what they ought to speak, and causes them to do it. Mayest thou, O Holy Spirit, speak in me upon all occasions, since on all occasions I ought to speak like a Christian, only for the glory of God, and by thy impulse and direction!

21. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the

father the child: and the children shall rise up against *their* parents, and cause them to be put to death.

Although good men be left to the wicked for a while, yet one ought not to be scandalized at it; Jesus Christ himself was left thus. We accuse the gospel of severity, because it requires us to renounce our human passions and natural affections; and yet there is nothing in all this which comes near that which the devil here causes the wicked to do. Very often by means of detraction, coloured and disguised under a pretence of piety, men in some manner exercise this cruelty, arming Christian against Christian, the shepherd against the sheep, and the sheep against the shepherd.

22. And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

Two things are necessary in order to salvation. The first, to suffer at the hands of the world. The second, to persevere under suffering. It is grievous to nature to see one's self continually exposed to the hatred of carnal men; but when it is for thy name's sake, O my God—for the sake of thy truth, and for being faithful to thee—how lovely is this hatred! Salvation is the fruit of perseverance; but perseverance is a gift of God, as little due to the sinner as salvation itself.

SECT. IV.—PERSECUTION TO BE AVOIDED.

23. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

It is prudence and humility, when charity or righteousness obliges us not to the contrary, to avoid persecution. To deprive those who are disposed to do evil of the opportunities of doing it, to convey the grace which they despise to others, to accomplish the designs of God's justice on the former, and of his mercy on the latter, are consequences of the flight of a persecuted preacher. This flight is a matter of precept to pastors who are necessary to the church; of advice to those who would draw upon themselves persecution; and of indulgence for those who are weak. But this flight is highly criminal in those mercenary pastors who abandon the flock to the wolf.

24. The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord.

He who keeps this saying in his heart, will never complain of what he suffers, nor seek for any other way to save himself, but humiliation and the cross. How many irregular thoughts, affections, and motions, is this maxim capable of restraining! Let us remember, that Jesus Christ is the great Master of humility, suffering, and poverty; and that we are his disciples. A man is not such, unless he learn his doctrine; and he does not learn it as he ought, unless he put it in practice.

25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household?

What injustice is it for a Christian, being a disciple of Christ, to desire to be treated well by the world! What a shame, not to be able to suffer so much as a word, after all which He has suffered! This delicacy and tenderness in ministers of the gospel, and in a Christian; contests about small rights or imaginary prerogatives; and an excessive sense of injuries, do but little agree with this maxim. This is a solid consolation for those who are oppressed under the calumnies of false brethren.

26. Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

He who can make us suffer nothing but what Christ has suffered, is not to be feared. Men cannot make any thing die in us, but what died in him. Had men always been feared, we should never have had any martyrs. God sees every thing; this is the comfort of good men, and the despair of the wicked. When a man has once undertaken the ministry of the word, he ought to consider more the designs of God, as to the truths of the gospel, which he would have made manifest, than the threats of men, who set themselves in opposition thereto. It is of small import for one man to be crushed by another; but it is of the greatest importance that God's will be done, and his truth known, honoured, and defended by men.

27. What I tell you in darkness, *that* speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, *that* preach ye upon the housetops.

A man ought to preach only that which he has learned

from God, in the secret exercise of prayer, of meditation on the Scriptures, and of the study of the holy fathers. In this lies the obligation of the ministers of the gospel, who should be the disciples of God, and of his word, before they become the instructors of the faithful. The church has now no more hidden mysteries, nor secret truths; and it is now the time to reveal all the knowledge and grace which Christ has committed to her. It is to injure religion, to imagine that it contains some truths or mysteries which ought to be concealed. It is to do wrong to Christians, to deprive them of that which is designed for their sanctification and salvation. This is to resist the Holy Ghost, who is given to the church on purpose to teach it all truth.

SECT. V.—GOD ONLY TO BE FEARED AND TRUSTED.

28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

It is prudence, to deliver up the body in order to save the soul; this is to cast the lading of the vessel into the sea, to preserve the men from destruction. A man loses nothing when he loses that only which must perish. That which is visible in me is in the power of men; but it is not by this that I am what I am. Let us fear none but him, who can make the invisible and immortal part of us suffer and die. My God is my life; I die not, but when I lose him. What strange blindness is it, to expose that part of ourselves which should enjoy God eternally, to save that by which we enjoy nothing but the creatures, and them only for a moment! It is not hell which we must fear, but that Almighty Being who there punishes those eternally, who have been so far from loving him above all things, that they have preferred a mere trifle to him.

29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

All things are ordered by the will of God; this is the great consolation of those who suffer. The belief of his providence is a powerful support under the most grievous accidents of

life. Nothing escapes his observation, not even the smallest things, of which he is only the Creator; how much less those, whereof he is the Father, the Saviour, and the eternal felicity!

30. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Nothing is more wonderful, or more incomprehensible, than the care and concern of God for his elect. The least circumstances of their life are regulated, not by the general providence, which extends to all things, but by a particular providence, which fits and directs all things to the design of their salvation. Every thing is happy in the death of a true Christian, how sudden, unfortunate, and calamitous soever it appear, because every thing therein promotes his salvation.

31. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

How great is the value of a soul for which Christ has given his blood and his life! What confidence ought it not to have in his goodness! It is just, O Lord, that he should have nothing but fear and disquiet who will not rest in thy providence. How sweet is it to trust to thee, and to leave thee to act as thou pleasest!

SECT. VI.—JESUS CHRIST IS TO BE CONFESSED.

32. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

To confess Jesus Christ, is to follow his precepts and example; to suffer for his sake; to love, teach, and practise his doctrine. We have but little faith, if such a promise is not capable of encouraging us to bear testimony to the truth at the expense of all things. We own Christ, when we own his doctrine, his ministers, his servants, and when no fear hinders us from supporting and assisting them in the time of necessity. We refer this great truth to the times of the martyrs for no other reason, but only because we will not ourselves be martyrs for the truth. It belongs to all times, and to all sorts of persons: every one in his proper way.

33. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Whoever prefers his interest to his duty, with relation to truth and justice, he sets a greater value upon the friendship

of men than upon that of God, and in some manner denies Jesus Christ. What confusion will it be to those, who shall not have confessed Christ before men, to see themselves denied by him before God! Did we thoroughly conceive, that to be denied by Christ, is to have him neither for a Mediator nor a Saviour, but to be treated as reprobates; human respects, and the fear of men, could have no influence upon us. To appear before the tribunal of God, without having Christ for our advocate; and on the contrary, to have him there as a party, a witness, and a Judge: how can we think of it, and not expire with horror!

34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

Notwithstanding this declaration of Christ, it is this earthly peace and repose which all the world seek. If it be a sin, to think that this repose, built on secular desires and a false peace of conscience, is consistent with the gospel of Christ, what will it be to teach this doctrine, to preach it, and by means of dangerous maxims to confirm and encourage souls therein.

35. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

The truths of the gospel set at variance in order to unite to God, and oppose the false peace of concupiscence, for no other end but to establish that of charity. It is very hard to deprive ourselves of the comfort of these relations; but we shall receive ample amends, by that incomprehensible union with God and Christ which attends us in heaven, and by the society of angels and saints which is promised us by truth itself.

36. And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household.

Our relations then are oftentimes the greatest enemies of our salvation. The greater our fondness is toward earthly things, the more capable are they of hurting us in respect of our salvation. The father is the enemy of his son, when, through a bad education, an irregular love, and a cruel indulgence, he leaves him to take a wrong bias, instructs him not in his duty, and puts ambition into his head. The son is the

father's enemy, when he is the occasion of his doing injustice, in order to heap up an estate for him, and to make his fortune. The mother is the daughter's enemy, when she instructs her to please the world, breeds her up in excess and vanity, and suffers any thing scandalous and unseemly in her dress. The daughter is the mother's, when she becomes her idol, when she engages her to comply with her own irregular inclinations, and to permit her to frequent plays and balls. The master is the enemy of his servant, and the servant that of his master, when the one takes no care of the other's salvation, and the other is subservient to his master's passions.

SECT. VII.—THE PREDOMINANT LOVE.—CONTEMPT OF LIFE.

37. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

He who loves not Christ above all things is not worthy to have him for his Head. The life and the works are the things which show plainly, which of all these affections reigns in the heart. He whom we love the most, is he whom we study most to please, and whose will and interests we most commonly prefer. Let us judge ourselves by this rule. He who is not worthy of Christ, that is, to be a Christian and member of Christ, is unworthy of any thing but hell. A soul, raised above all earthly things, is that which is worthy of Jesus Christ.

38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

To take the cross and follow after Christ, is not a bare matter of advice, but a necessary means of salvation. It is not sufficient, in order to be really worthy of Christ, for a man not to be fond of any of the sweets of life; he must also be prepared for all the bitterness of the cross. A wicked person refuses, instead of taking it; a philosopher seems to take it, but not in following Christ. Only the Christian takes it, either by choice or acceptance, and bears it for the sake of Christ, in his spirit, and after his example.

39. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

He who despises his life in time, preserves it to eternity.

The love of life is the most sensible and the most violent temptation; and it is even the love of life, which should make us surmount it; because we should be ready to give up our mortal life, in order to obtain that which is immortal. Whatever a man sacrifices to God is never lost, because he finds it again in God. That person may be said to lose his life for the sake of God, who sacrifices it by a state of repentance and mortification, or who employs it for God in that state and condition to which he has been pleased to call him.

SECT. VIII.—THE REWARD OF CHARITY.

40. ¶ He that receiveth you receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. 41. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward: and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

In our neighbour whom we assist, we must direct our eyes toward Christ by faith, if we would find him there by charity. It is no small honour, or slight advantage, to receive into one's house a minister of Jesus Christ. The less personal merit such minister has, the greater is faith which discovers that of Christ in him. Everybody is not admitted to exercise the sacred ministry; but none are excluded from partaking of its grace, its spirit, and its reward. No one can tell how far the charity of those extends, who contribute to the instruction of their neighbours; by being concerned in the maintenance of colleges, schools, catechetical lectures, missions, good pastors, and other truly evangelical workmen. But how much the more useful such a workman is, and the more service he does the church, so much the greater must his reward be, who entertains, receives, and supports him, for the sake of Christ and his church.

42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Charity heightens the smallest actions. It is this which recommends good works. Under a just and merciful God, no sin is unpunished, no good action is unrewarded. It belongs to men to reward what is done upon human motive; and to

God, to crown that which proceeds from a Christian disposition. Jesus Christ confirms this last promise with an oath; to this end, that we should not doubt but that the most indigent may exercise works of mercy, and that the least of such works will be rewarded. In the world, a man must make his court to great persons, and do them very great services, in order to receive a great reward for them. In the kingdom of God, a man, in doing the smallest services to the meanest persons, may justly hope for a very great reward.

CHAPTER XI.

SECT. I.—JOHN THE BAPTIST SENDS HIS DISCIPLES TO CHRIST.

1. And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.

Nothing persuades more, than for a man to put in practice himself the instructions which he gives to others. There is no empty space in a pastor's life. A good bishop is continually employed, either in forming and instructing subordinate ministers, or in teaching and labouring in the place of his residence, and his visitations.

2. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

A prisoner of Jesus Christ employs his thoughts less about his own condition and danger, than about the interests of his Master, and the salvation of those whom he has committed to his care. His consolation is, to entertain and fill his mind, not with the world, and with what passes therein, but with Christ, with his life, his works, his kingdom, and his church. To feed prisoners is a good work; but how much more so is it to show them the true Deliverer, the wonderful works of the mystery of redemption, what it is wherein their true captivity does consist, and what use they ought to make of the confinement of the body toward the deliverance of the soul. A director (of the conscience) should always send his disciples

to Christ, and teach them to have regard to him in every thing.

3. And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

There is a kind of holy address belonging to the pastoral charity and humility, which consists in knowing how to become weak with the weak; in hiding our knowledge like St. John, when the good of souls requires it; and in choosing rather that God should make himself known by himself, than by our ministry. He who really loves the majesty of God, loves also his own abasement. Yes, Lord, thou art he who shouldst come to heal, to sanctify, and to save me. Perform thy work in me; for I look not for another: and thou alone art my light, my strength, and my salvation.

4. Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

Christ would have men judge of him and of others only by works. One secret in the art of guiding souls is, to manage the tenderness of the weak, and to instruct them by seeming to instruct others. Even Christ, when asked concerning his mission, makes the proof of it evidently appear in his miracles, which had been foretold; and now, persons without piety, without mission, without authority, without succession, would oblige us to believe them upon their bare word. St. John points out the prophecies; Jesus Christ shows the completion of them in himself.

5. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

Cause, O my God, blind sinners to (see and) know thy truth, and the way of salvation; make them walk therein with a steady, even, and constant pace; let them be cleansed from the corruption of their heart; let them hear thy word with joy and with advantage; let them, as persons raised from the dead, live the new life of Christ; and let the most poor and miserable receive, love, and observe the gospel. Christ requires a heart which is poor, void of itself, and convinced of its own indigence, unworthiness, inability, and misery. Make

my heart, O Jesus, thus poor, that it may be enriched and satisfied with the sacred truths of thy gospel.

6. And blessed is *he,* whosoever shall not be offended in me.

He who reads or hears the word of God, and does not practise it, takes from thence an occasion of falling, and is offended at it. As Christ condemns the life and maxims of the world by his own; so the world condemns the life and maxims of Christ by those which it prefers before them; and this is to be offended or scandalized at them. If we be not as yet strong enough to enter into the ways of the gospel; at least let us esteem them, and not entertain any prejudice against them. A man is offended in Christ, when he does not follow him; how much more then, when he diverts others from the paths of piety and perfection, in softening the gospel by a loose morality? To design to amend the gospel, is to blame and condemn it.

SECT. II.—THE ELOGY OF ST. JOHN.

7. ¶ And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

One ought to avoid praising teachers, and (spiritual) directors, in the presence of those who esteem it an honour to be under them. Though the praise might not all exalt the disciple, yet it may reach even the master, and either tempt or corrupt him. Jesus Christ is not a false friend, who dares not declare for him who is in disgrace; on the contrary, he has spoke of and for St. John only since his imprisonment. When the world persecutes good men, then is the time for those who belong to God, with prudence to imitate Christ in relation to them. The first virtue of which Christ takes notice in St. John, is his steadfastness; and it is not without some mystery that he commends this virtue before all others in this minister of his word.

8. But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in king's houses.

The second is his mortified life, which gives authority to his preaching. A preacher should have nothing which appears

worldly, or which borders upon excess and softness. That man is mistaken, who thinks to prevail upon the world by conforming himself to its fashions and manners; the world will much sooner entirely corrupt the heart which opens itself thereto. Would to God, that in this age luxury and softness were to be seen only in kings' houses! It is a greater misfortune than we imagine, to see these vices overflow all ranks and conditions of men, even those of the most moderate fortune; this is what draws down the judgments of God upon us.

9. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

The third advantage of St. John is his gift of prophecy, whereby he discovers Christ. This is indeed to be "more than a prophet," for a man to point out the Saviour and sacrifice of the world, and to foreshow him by his retirement, his mortification, his preaching, and his faithfulness, so great, as even to die for the sake of truth. Preachers ought to imitate him, and to be in some measure more than prophets in this respect.

10. For this is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger* before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. (**Fr.* Angel.)

The fourth advantage of St. John is his office of being the harbinger of the Son of God. His mission is authorized by the Scriptures, not by miracles, because it is not extraordinary. A man should be an angel in purity, in knowledge, in zeal, and in activity, to prepare the way for Christ in the soul, as it is the duty of pastors to do.

11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The fifth advantage of this holy forerunner is his excellence beyond the other prophets, on the account both of his knowledge and the sanctity of his life. The latter, not the former, renders a man great in the sight of God. The way to be exalted in heaven above others, is to humble ourselves on earth below all. The greatest without comparison among all, is he who made himself the least of all, in stooping so low as to resemble sinners, and to become the Lamb or Sacrifice for sin.

12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

The sixth advantage of John the Baptist is to have set up the standard of repentance, which is the way to heaven. Heaven is not to be taken but by the violence which a man does to his inclinations. All right to eternal happiness is lost in Adam. It is not due to any one; this evangelical violence is that which carries it as by conquest. Happy those holy bands of penitents, those violent persons of the gospel, who, as it were, take heaven by the force of their prayers, their obedience, their humility, etc. But wo unto the men of this world, who know not what it is to deprive themselves of any thing, or to do the least violence to themselves in order to their own salvation!

13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The seventh advantage of St. John is his having first showed Jesus Christ present; whereas the state of the law was no more than a state prophetic of his coming, in which his mysteries were represented and typified; the prophets having only foretold the Saviour to come, and the true righteousness which he should bring into the world. Let us praise God that we live now, after that all has been unfolded, that truth has succeeded figures, that the promises have their effect, that the prophecies are fulfilled, that Jesus is given, and that he has wrought the salvation of men!

14. And if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias, which was for to come.

The last advantage which Christ would have us observe in St. John, is his having been an Elias by his office, his zeal, and his fidelity. He did that at the first coming of Christ, which Elias (perhaps) will do at the second. Pastors should do the same in proportion, in order to the coming of Christ into the soul, by their faithfulness in making him known, by their zeal, their mortification, and their constancy. This is what few are willing to comprehend. Give us, Lord, some Johns and Eliases, who may both understand and do for souls that which thou requirest of them!

15. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Happy he, who has the ears of the heart; for they are not given to all. This is a gift which we must often beg. We frequently lose our time in desiring and expecting an Elias, a good director (of the conscience) to assist our endeavours after perfection or salvation; whereas a good will, and the ears of the heart, are the things which are wanting, and for which we should earnestly pray.

SECT. III.—BOTH JESUS AND JOHN REJECTED OF THE JEWS.

16. ¶ But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, 17. And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

The wicked person, by his malice, makes all which God has done for his salvation become fruitless. Nothing but charity can make it beneficial. There are some, to whom every thing is useful in leading them to God; others, to whom nothing is sufficient. To these, the easy and less austere ways seem too remiss; and yet a more rigorous and severe kind of life quite disheartens them. The defect is in the heart, and not in the means. Every thing is good to a good heart; every thing is hurtful to a corrupt one.

18. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

The sinner will not be persuaded, that what he has no mind to imitate can come from God. There are such violent aversions in some persons, as to make them rather blame even virtue itself, than esteem it in those whom they do not love. This vice has several degrees; let us take care that there be no degree of it in ourselves. Men sometimes affect to appear wise and prudent in condemning those ways which seem too austere. Pride, envy, and vanity, are the sources of these false and rash judgments.

19. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Whatever measures good men take, they will never escape the censures of the world; the best way is not to be concerned

at them. Iniquity, being always ready to oppose and contradict the divine conduct, often contradicts itself. God still finds his glory, not only in the faithfulness of the righteous, but even in the hardness of the wicked, bringing good out of evil itself. Wisdom, which does all for the sake of the elect, knows thereby how to find the justification of her different ways in their salvation, to which she makes every thing subservient. We discover in all things sufficient cause to adore the wisdom and goodness of God, when we are of the number of the true children of this incarnate Wisdom.

SECT. IV.—THE IMPENITENT CITIES WORSE THAN SODOM.

20. ¶ Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

Happy he, who, by a speedy conversion and a true repentance, prevents the reproaches which his conscience would otherwise cast upon him at the hour of death. The more effects of his power God has employed to draw us to himself, the more inexcusable are we. We cannot complain that we have seen no miracles, since all those of our Creator are exposed to the eyes of our mind and of our body, and all those of our Saviour to the eyes of our faith. Let us take to ourselves these reproaches of our Lord, since his miracles also are designed for us.

21. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

An impenitent Christian is worse than a Pagan; and his heart is more insensible to the divine word and to miracles than an infidel's. Let us adore the judgments of God in the distribution of his gracious dispensations, without desiring to pry into the reasons of them; and let us not cease to thank him, that his great goodness to us has suffered no obstruction from our extreme ingratitude.

22. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

How terrible are God's judgments on the impenitent! Every thing will help to overwhelm them at the tribunal of

God; the benefits and favours which they have received, as well as the sins which they have committed. The divine mercies, which the sinner now buries in oblivion, shall be then rendered present to his mind, in order to his confusion and condemnation. Let us prevent this misfortune.

23. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

The proud, who of all sinners are the most difficult to be converted, shall likewise be the most humbled. Pride is a vice, which, instead of diminishing, increases with time. Ye great men of the world, ye rich men of the earth, who think of nothing but how to advance yourselves, and who are never satisfied with wealth, honours, and preferments, read here the sentence of your condemnation if you continue impenitent. Pride hardens the heart even more than the greatest sins of impurity. There is nothing more opposite to the Christian religion, the whole design of which is to make us humble. Every man has some degree of pride, and therefore ought to examine the progress or decrease of it.

24. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

There is a difference and inequality of pains in hell, answerable to that of sins. The contempt and abuse of preaching, and of the word of God, will be there dreadfully punished. Men glory in having holy preachers; and it is this very thing which brings a severer judgment upon those who continue in impenitence. Lord, humble us at present, rather than reserve us for the eternal humiliation of the reprobate!

SECT. V.—THE WISE BLINDED, THE SIMPLE ENLIGHTENED.

25. ¶ At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Ye wise men of the world, who are prudent in your own sight, fear lest you should be left to your own darkness in the business of salvation, while the humble shall walk by the divine light. Let us dread, but not endeavour to fathom the

judgments of God, which are just, terrible, and unsearchable. It was one of the employments of Christ on earth to adore them, and glorify his Father for them; it ought likewise to be the employment of Christians. They have a beauty, which we shall never fully discover but in heaven. The full sight of God's mercies toward his elect, of their preference, distinction, and separation from the corrupt mass, deserves the praise and acknowledgment even of Christ's heart; and this heart alone is worthy to know them perfectly, because to him they are given by his Father. Simplicity and humility are their distinguishing character. My God and my Saviour imprint on my heart this amiable character, which is the mark of thy elect.

26. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

Let us with fear and trembling adore the conduct of God in the disposal of his creatures, and the distribution of his favours. The knowledge of the mysteries of religion and divine truths ought not to puff up any one, because it is a gift altogether free, and which proceeds purely from the will of God. He is master of his own gifts, but he divides them by a will full of wisdom, and upon motives which are in himself, not in us, and which tend to the manifestation of his greatness and power, of his mercy and justice.

27. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.

This is a great truth, and the key of the science of salvation. Christ is the sovereign dispenser of this, and the Lord of all things, by the donation of his Father. All the springs, and the whole dispensation of the divine favours, are in the hand of Christ, as priest and sacrifice of God, as Saviour and mediator, head and pattern, pastor and sovereign judge of men. There is no knowledge, no belief of the mystery of the most Holy Trinity, but what is a gift of God by Jesus Christ, and according to his will. How lovely is this dependence! O Jesus, I accept it with joy, I desire to depend on thee. Make me know the Father; make thyself known to me; but let the love in me be yet greater than the knowledge.

SECT. VI.—THE EASY YOKE.

28. ¶ Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Our only remedy is to have recourse to Christ, under our troubles and afflictions, after our miscarriages, in our temptations, and in our inability to do good. How sweet is it to have our dependence on a God who comes to meet us, in order to solicit us to come to him! Sinners, wearied in the ways of iniquity, throw yourselves into the bosom of this amiable Shepherd, who while on earth took so much pains to seek you, and to bring you back to his fold. Penitents, humbled under the weight of your crimes, unite yourselves to this sanctifying Victim, who bore your sins on the cross. Christians, overburdened with the multitude of your defects, and with the greatness of your duties, lift up yourselves to this eternal High-Priest, who is at the right-hand of God his Father, and presents himself continually before his face in your behalf. Jesus excepts none: *all* are invited and urged to go to him. But in order to do so, he must speak to the heart, and say, "Come unto me," in such a manner as to make it hear, and to attract it. No man goes to Christ without receiving rest. He himself promises it, and shall we not believe it? I would fain come to thee, O Lord; but as thou givest me the will, be thou also my guide, my light, and my strength, to conduct me to thyself.

29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Strange paradox! that a man already weary and overloaded, must take a new weight upon him, in order to be eased, and to find *rest!* But Christ's yoke eases those whom charity inclines to bear it. Jesus Christ is the sole teacher of humility. There is no rest, but only for the humble in heart. Pride is the source of a thousand disquiets. It is not sufficient to go to Christ by faith; we must take upon us the yoke of his law and gospel, that we may conform our lives thereto, and study his dispositions and behaviour, that we may be capable of imitating them. In the schools of the world,

some study philosophy, others physic, law, etc. In the school of Christ, every one must study meekness and humility; for to these two the whole science of Christianity may be reduced. Meekness of charity: calm and sedate in the midst of wrongs, injuries, affronts, persecutions, without envy, without revenge. Humility of heart: remote from all inordinate and worldly desires by which pride is nourished, ascribing nothing to itself, and desiring nothing, ready to part with all things, to be placed below all men, to remain in silence and oblivion. Lord, vouchsafe to teach us this science, writing it in our hearts by thy love!

30. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.

How easy and sweet is it, to serve Christ, even in bearing his cross! How hard and painful is the slavery of the world, of sin, and of our own passions, even with all their false pleasures! That satisfaction, peace, and comfort which grace gives here below, and that which hope encourages us to expect in heaven, make a Christian full amends for all his pains in subduing his passions, and in opposing the world. A yoke which Christ takes together with us, can that be uneasy? A burden which he bears in us by his Spirit, can that be heavy? Come, taste and know by experience how sweet the Lord is, and how worthy his yoke is to be chosen and loved!

CHAPTER XII.

SECT. I.—THE EARS OF CORN PLUCKED.—THE OBSERVATION OF THE SABBATH.

1. At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were ahungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

Who will not wonder at the extreme poverty of Jesus Christ and his disciples? He was himself present with them, and yet suffered them to want bread! A man, therefore, is not forsaken of God because he is in want. It is more honour to suffer in the fellowship and spirit of Christ, than, in the midst

of the world, to have all things in abundance. If, when we first begin to serve God, we should also begin to suffer, and to have more temporal necessities, we should not be surprised at it; the riches of Jesus Christ, and those of his disciples, are all spiritual.

2. But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

The pretenders to devotion are sometimes superstitious to inhumanity, sometimes indulgent even to impiety; the true lovers of the law regulate their exactness in observing it by the intent of the law. God sometimes permits such things in the church as may perhaps make some persons murmur, on purpose to afford an opportunity of attacking superstitions or popular errors. Envy is always ready to blame and to condemn. Conceited sciolists are still forward to determine to the disadvantage of others that which they do not understand.

3. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was ahungered, and they that were with him;

The example of holy men, which the Scripture relates without any censure, may serve to regulate our behaviour. We must, after the example of Christ, confute those by Scripture, who misapply it contrary to charity, and who flatter themselves that they understand it. It is the effect of envy to make us easily see what may serve to accuse others, and not perceive what may justify them.

4. How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

Positive laws cease to oblige four ways:—First, by the natural law of necessity. Charity opens the eyes and the understanding in defence of slandered innocence. No consecration of things can dispense with the charity which is due to our neighbour in necessity.

5. Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? 6. But I say unto you, That in this place is *one* greater than the temple.

In the second place, positive laws cease to oblige, by means of some other particular law, which is superior. That which

is done for the service of God, ought not to be looked upon as a thing profane. Christ is not discouraged at the malice of his enemies, but gives them occasion to reflect upon all they had seen, which fully proved his divinity. The reverence and devotion of the Jews in their temple, which was only figurative, will condemn the irreverence and profaneness of Christians in the presence of Christ, who is the true temple.

7. But if ye had known what *this* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

In the third place, the obligation of these laws yields to the law of charity and mercy, which is preferable to all other. Few, even among Christians, do thoroughly know, with regard to practice, what this sentence means. It is easy enough to sacrifice to God external things; the sacrifice of charity is that which he requires. The liberty to judge ill of others, is what most agreeably flatters the heart of the sons of Adam. The world is sometimes full of wrongs and violences, which have no other foundation but unjust and rash judgments. The multiplying the external sacrifice of works, is no certain sign of a progress in holiness; but a proficiency in charity and mercy toward our neighbour is always such.

8. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

Lastly, these laws cease to oblige by a lawful dispensation, or by the authority of the legislator. Jesus Christ is Lord; when we once know his will, we must obey it. The change of the Jewish into the Christian and spiritual Sabbath, shows that Christ is not only the Lord, but also the truth and completion of it. When, Lord, wilt thou change this Sabbath into that of eternity, into that unchangeable rest which thou reservest for the people of God?

SECT. II.—THE WITHERED HAND RESTORED.

9. And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:
10. ¶ And, behold, there was a man which had *his* hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

Envy is an implacable enemy, which it is very dangerous for a man to admit into his heart; she is provoked, and her

malignity fed, even by her neighbour's charity. The fear of giving offence to pharisaical persons, should not hinder an evangelical labourer from going forward with God's work, according to his rules and maxims. A truly good man is always disposed to excuse what is evil in his brethren; a hypocrite seeks occasion to accuse them even from good itself. This last makes no manner of scruple about plain and evident crimes, and acts the scrupulous person in things most clearly and manifestly good.

11. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift *it* out?

Charity sometimes bears with what is done only out of worldly interest; envy cannot bear even that which is done out of charity. Interest is a very decisive casuist, and removes abundance of scruples in a moment. It is always the soonest consulted, and the most readily obeyed. We are not indeed forbid to hearken to it; but we must not let it govern, or determine by itself.

12. How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

He who violates charity, violates the law, though he observe the letter of it. He who exercises charity, observes the law, even then, when for just reasons he neglects the letter. There are but too many Christians who do more for the sake of a beast of profit or pleasure, than for their neighbour. If we owe a great deal to a man, let him be what he will, how much more to a Christian, together with whom we help to form the body of Christ? Strange corruption of the heart of man, to whom it must be proved that he is permitted at all times to do good!

13. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

The bare will of Jesus Christ has an almighty power of restoring life and vigour to our souls. He makes the affliction evident, in order to make known his mercy, and to excite that of the Pharisees. When God designs to heal the withered hand of a sinner, he need only give command, and the sinner

begins presently to stretch it forth toward him by prayer, and toward his neighbour by alms, and by all the assistances which he owes him. Lord, my soul is before thee, like this hand; vouchsafe to show it the same mercy!

14. ¶ Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

Nothing sooner leads to blindness and hardness of heart than envy; and when once a man is brought to that, of what is he not capable? To exercise charity on a sabbath day is crime,—to labour on the same day to destroy one's neighbour is a good work!—thus reasons a corrupt heart before it is aware. Such a one gives himself up to all sorts of wickedness on days the most holy, who will condemn without mercy a poor man whom necessity forces to work on any such day; to that degree may a man's heart, not devoted to God, be blinded as to himself, and hardened toward his neighbour.

SECT. III.—THE MEEKNESS OF THE MESSIAH.—THE BRUISED REED AND SMOKING FLAX.

15. But when Jesus knew *it*, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;

It is the part of prudence and charity not to provoke the blind and the hardened, and to take from them the occasion of sin. The man of God gives place to persecution. He appears amid the world, only to do good in it; he retires from it when he is no longer useful in it, or when the obstacles to good are, humanly speaking, invincible. Men still find much good by following Christ; but it is he himself who draws those after him whom he intends to heal. Let us follow the Physician of our souls, and never leave him.

16. And charged them that they should not make him known:

Let us love to be hid with Christ, either out of humility or necessity; there is always some advantage in it. To secure himself from being discovered, he uses no other than human means, for which he had no occasion, to teach us not to neglect them in our necessity. He could have concealed himself as God; but he chooses rather to do it as man, for the instruction and edification of men. He makes use of his

power, less on his own account, than on that of men, because he knows that his Father gave it him for them. How much charity and meekness, how much prudence and humility, are here to be imitated in him!

17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 18. Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.

The majesty of God is so great as to have a God-man for his servant! It was by his Father's choice that he entered into this condition; and it is by the same choice that men must enter into the sacred ministry. Christ is, by way of excellence, the Servant of God—being alone worthy to serve him. He who serves God faithfully, becomes his delight. The perfect fulness of the Holy Spirit dwells in Christ alone—and we can receive none of it, but from this fulness. How ought he to be replenished with it who is appointed to preach the truth? The Spirit of Jesus Christ must be in a minister of God, and that not transiently nor feebly, but after a full and persevering manner, and must reside in him.

19. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

How lovely is this meekness of Christ! How worthy to be imitated! His spirit is not a spirit of contention, murmuring, clamour, or litigiousness. He who loves all this, belongs not to him. The meekness of Jesus Christ, as his Father's minister, was particularly foretold, on purpose to teach the clergy that their ministry is not a ministry of pride, imperiousness, and violence, but of humility, moderation, and mildness.

20. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

The strength of the perfect must not be left inactive; the good which is in the weak and imperfect must be managed with prudence; and even the most wicked must not be driven to despair. Let nothing discourage us; for truth will certainly prevail. But let us have patience; for neither Christ nor his truth will completely triumph till after the last judg-

ment. He bears with the enemies of his truth and his church in this life, because this is the time of humiliation and suffering; his power will break forth at the time of triumph.

21. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Jesus Christ is the sole trust and hope of Christians. To trust and hope in his name, is to expect salvation, and all things necessary thereto, from him alone; to despise all earthly promises; to esteem, love, and desire only heavenly things; and to bear with patience and tranquillity all the losses and evils of this life, upon the prospect and hopes of that felicity which he has obtained for us.

SECT. IV.—THE POSSESSED, BLIND, AND DUMB.—THE BLASPHEMY OF THE PHARISEES.—THE DIVIDED KINGDOM.

22. ¶ Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

The devil makes himself master of the heart, the eyes, and the tongue of the sinner:—Of his heart, by possessing it with the love of sin; of the eyes of his mind, by hindering him from seeing the guilt and consequences of it; and of his tongue, by diverting him from prayer and confession. Work, O my God, these three miracles upon sinners, and deliver my heart from every degree of this threefold captivity!

23. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

Let us but reflect upon what God has done in us, and upon what he can do, to drive out the evil spirit of sin, to open our eyes, and untie our tongues; and we shall be then wrapt up in admiration, and full of hopes, with much greater cause than this people. Whenever we have a good thought, a holy desire, or an edifying word, let us say, without hesitation, "The son of David works this in us;" and let us say it with gratitude.

24. But when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, This *fellow* doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

The more disciples truth gains, the more enemies she raises.

Thus it is that the malicious world sometimes ascribes the conversion of sinners to motives of covetousness and interest, or to some passion contrary to the Spirit of God. Can the spirit of contradicton, hatred, and envy proceed farther than this, to choose rather to give to the devil than to God, the honour of a work which it is forced to acknowledge as miraculous? It is a sin more common than we imagine, for men to be unwilling to own the finger of God in those they hate.

25. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: 26. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

Christ knows the secrets of the heart: and this is a new proof of his divinity, which cannot be attributed to the devil. God permits those who, out of a spirit of envy and contradiction, oppose the truth, to fall into manifest contradictions themselves. Division ruins every thing; and the stability of the church depends upon its unity, which must never be broken on any account whatsoever.

27. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.

The affections have a great share in our judgments; and we must take care that envy do not make us condemn that in one which we approve in another. There were exorcists among the Jews.

28. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

None but Christ can destroy the kingdom of the devil. Wherever God's Spirit is, there is also the kingdom of God. The destruction of that of Satan is a proof and an effect of the incarnation. Christ, by freeing the bodies of the possessed, shows plainly what he came to do in the soul. Exert thy power upon mine, O Jesus, and by thy Spirit prevent all the attempts against thy rights which the evil spirit would otherwise there make!

SECT. V.—THE STRONG MAN ARMED.—THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.—THE TREASURE OF THE HEART.—THE IDLE WORD.

29. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

Men, through sin, are become the house of Satan, having, of their own accord, surrendered themselves up to this unjust possessor. Whoever gives up his soul to sin, gives it up to the devil. Christ alone can deliver from this bondage, and bind the power of this strong one. Return into thy house and into thy rights, O my God! and take possession again, by Christ, of my heart and mind, and of all the good things wherewith thou hast been pleased to furnish me!

30. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

In vain do men seek for ways of accommodation to soften the gospel: there is no medium between loving God and being his enemy; between belonging to Christ or to the devil; between being governed by charity or self-love! If we would belong to Christ as we ought, we must give ourselves entirely to him. He alone has paid down the price for us; he alone ought to be our Lord. When Jesus Christ, his truth, his precepts, and his servants, are openly assaulted, how can a man avoid declaring for them, without incurring the guilt of deserting and betraying them? How many are there in the world who are really against Christ, and "scatter abroad," who yet flatter themselves that they are workers together with him, and in the number of his friends!

31. ¶ Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against* the *Holy* Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

There is nothing more contrary to the Holy Ghost and his grace, than to withstand manifest truth, to decry good doctrine and Christian maxims in opposition to particular persons, and to attribute to an evil spirit that which proceeds from the Spirit of God. This is the sin of arrogant scholars, and of

selfish, envious, and opinionative bigots, out of which they scarce ever recover. The forgiveness of this sin is not absolutely impossible, but only very rare, because the conversion of such persons is very rare and difficult. The people are converted in crowds, but very few Scribes and Pharisees yield to the truth.

32. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come.

Jesus Christ, who came to be abased, has endured all manner of humiliation in his flesh, but he will not be abased in his Spirit. Whatever ignominies and persecutions he suffered in his life and death at the hands of the Jews, were forgiven those who received the faith, after the mission of the Holy Ghost; but there is no mercy for such as have rejected the testimony of this Holy Spirit in the preaching of the apostles, in the miracles, gifts, and other marvellous effects produced by him in the church. Impenitency is the most common punishment of this kind of spiritual sins.

33. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by *his* fruit.

The fruit is always like the tree—the works like the will. Nothing good can proceed from an evil spirit—no good fruit from a corrupt heart, unless it be renewed and moved by the good Spirit, which only can render it good. If we would know our heart, let us view our actions. That is good, if our life be so; that is devoted to the world, if this be conformable to the maxims thereof.

34. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

These are very severe words, but such as were justly due to the malignity of the Pharisees. Charity has its sting, but never uses it except in order to heal. What good can a soil so bad as the heart of man produce of itself? What judgment shall we make of our own, if we judge of it by our vain, slanderous, light, bitter, and haughty words? All the sons of Adam have naturally a pharisaical heart. Thou

alone, O Jesus, canst change it into a Christian heart, by conferring upon it Christian virtues out of thy fulness!

35. A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

The good heart is the good treasure, and it is charity makes it so; for charity only never offends. Concupiscence produces nothing but what is evil, and makes the evil heart and the evil treasure.

36. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

It is no small matter to know how to rule the tongue, and to restrain the unprofitable use thereof. God would not have us doubt but that he will demand an account of it. And if he demand it of every vain, idle, and unprofitable word, how much more then of every calumnious, impure, and offensive word, contrary to religion and charity? How terrible is this exactness of the divine justice!—the very thought of which should be enough to dry up the source of such a multitude of words which have no necessity, no usefulness to excuse them.

37. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

There are few who conceive how instrumental the tongue is to salvation or condemnation. We count words as nothing; and yet eternity depends upon them! Set a guard, O Lord, upon my mouth, and reduce my tongue under an absolute subjection to thyself!

SECT. VI.—JONAS A SIGN.—THE NINEVITES.—THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH.

38. ¶Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

Incredulity, pride, and curiosity have never proofs enough of the truth. Learned men have particular reason to fear these vices. To require miracles in this age is to affront and injure God, and, like the persons before us, to make no account of all those which he has wrought for the establishment of the gospel. The proofs of religion are not in the choice of men: God only knows those which are most proper.

39. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

Christ complies with the weakness of men, but never with their extravagant desires. He takes notice of the corruption of heart in these wretches, to show the cause of their incredulity and of his refusal. That man wrongs the truth who submits to the caprice of its enemies in the manner of proving it. It is natural for unbelievers to imagine, that a miracle wrought on purpose for them would change their heart. But it is presumption, blindness, and delusion, to expect extraordinary signs in order to conversion. What miracle can convert him to whom even the resurrection of Christ is not sufficient? The general resurrection and last judgment will indeed do it; but that will be too late.

40. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly: so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Our blessed Saviour's resurrection is his grand miracle, the confirmation of all the rest, the seal of his mission. Jonas is the most eminent type of Christ, as preacher of repentance, as voluntary victim of his people, as returning alive from the grave and hell three days after his burial, and as abandoning the Jews after his resurrection, to preach salvation to the Gentiles. These types and prophecies are very strong arguments for the truth of religion.

41. The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here.

Impenitency is the greatest of all misfortunes; and into this they must necessarily fall who hear not Jesus Christ. We shall have those for witnesses or judges of whom we would not be the imitators. The fear of temporal destruction causes a people to repent, who had neither Moses nor Christ, neither the law nor the prophets, and who, perhaps, never had but this one preacher among them. What judgment, then, shall we undergo, if we continue impenitent, after all that which has been bestowed upon us!

42. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this

generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon *is* here.

How many who affect the character of strong reasoning, believe, without any proof, what comes from places the most distant, and yet take a pride in doubting of the gospel, though confirmed by so many miracles? Men are apt to run after such preachers as are most powerful in word and deed, and to value themselves upon adhering to them; when it is this very thing which will condemn them the more. Whenever we read the gospel, our faith should thus dictate to us: "He who is here, who speaks here, is both greater than Jonas, and wiser than Solomon; let our respect, obedience, and fidelity be proportionably increased."

SECT. VII.—THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT ENTERING AGAIN.—RELAPSES.

43. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

The devil ceases not to tempt those whom Christ has taken from him; he has no other joy but only in doing hurt to man. The unfaithfulness of a Christian, and the relapse of a penitent, are his delight. Strange debasement of a spirit created to enjoy God, and to rest in him, not to be able to find any rest but in a corrupt heart! If a man of great power placed his happiness in ruining us, should we venture to be long asleep? Let us watch, therefore, and arm ourselves with faith and prayer; for it is not a man whom we are to resist.

44. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth *it* empty, swept, and garnished.

Unhappy that person whom the devil still looks upon as his house, because his evil habits are yet alive at the bottom of his heart, or are only suspended! In what condition is a soul, when, on one side, the devil besieges and attacks it with an eagerness and application which are indefatigable; and, on the other, the soul itself opens the gate to him out of sloth and cowardice? Let us consider, whether this soul be not our own. Negligence and idleness invite the devil. The

secret to keep him out, is to employ all our time in good works, and to be wholly taken up with God.

45. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

The devil makes new efforts, and takes new precautions, that he may not fail to ruin us, while we, perhaps, use none at all to escape him. This is because he counts our loss his gain and delight, and we count not our salvation our proper business. How much is a relapse to be dreaded! This renders the sinner worse and more intolerable than before, through his ingratitude and perfidiousness. Habits are formed and strengthened by relapses; and relapses are multiplied and become more incurable through new habits. How is it that the sinner has not eyes to see what a soul is when deserted by the Holy Ghost and his seven gifts, and made a slave to as many contrary habits,—as it were, to "seven devils," to whom it has surrendered up itself by sin? A galley-slave, loaded with seven chains, would raise compassion in us. With what terror, then, ought we to be affected at the idea of a captive soul, reduced, by frequent relapses, under the power of seven devils!

SECT. VIII.—CHRIST'S MOTHER AND BRETHREN.

46. ¶ While he yet talked to the people, behold, *his* mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. 47. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

How great are the modesty and humility of the blessed virgin, who does not interrupt her son while he is talking to the people, but is contented to stand without! Her pious concern for a son, whose absence sensibly affected her, is the cause of her coming,—not the desire of having a share in the applause of the people.

48. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

How holy soever relations are, a clergyman, who understands the holiness of his office, professes not to know them

in the sacred ministry. It is always a loss to be diverted from God's work by any human thing whatsoever. A minister of eternal salvation ought to be above every thing which is temporal. This answer seems a little harsh, but it is sanctifying for the virgin, corrective for the other relations, and instructive for all.

49. And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! 50. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Grace and faithfulness to God, unite us to Jesus Christ in all respects. He shows us here what a truly apostolical person is. Such a one is insensible to the affections of flesh and blood, entirely taken up and employed about God's work, and full of tenderness for souls,—he has nothing in his heart and before his eyes but the divine will; he adheres to God only, regards him only in all things, and counts as nothing whatever belongs not to him; he knows no relations on earth, but such as have God for their Father in heaven; and he consecrates and sanctifies every passion and affection of nature, by turning and applying them to the souls committed to his charge, to whom he is instead of a father, a mother, or a brother, by affording them all kind of assistance and relief.

CHAPTER XIII.

SECT. I.—PARABLE OF THE SOWER.—BLIND HEARTS.—BLESSED ARE THE EYES WHICH SEE.

1. The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.

An evangelical labourer allows himself but little rest. His charity makes him quit the comforts of his house and family, to place himself in a readiness to relieve the wants of souls.

2. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

The word of God, preached after a holy manner invites the faithful. The love of it is more quick and ardent in the

meaner sort, than in the rich and learned. We see here a representation of the church, which consists of the people united to their pastors. These, being more exposed to violent tossings and storms, are, as it were, in a ship, while those continue at ease on the shore.

3. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

Let us not be discouraged at the obscurity which is in the parables of the Scripture. Truth conceals herself under them, not that she may not be discovered, but that she may oblige us to search after her. It is a double gain, to attain to the knowledge of divine truths, both by the gift of God and by (means of) our own desires, endeavours, and prayers. Our heart is God's field; it belongs to him to sow it. It is a very great misfortune to deny ourselves the benefit of this divine seed, by neglecting to read or hear the word of God.

4. And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Let us take care lest our heart become a highway, open to all the world, trampled by passengers, covered with the dust of vanity, fouled by the dirt of pleasures, hardened by habitual sin, and exposed to devils. Distraction of mind, diversions, and business, are the fowls which devour the good seed, filling the heart with vain, earthly, and dangerous things.

5. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: 6. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

What is a man the better for not having a heart like the highway, if he has one which is hard and stony as to divine matters? Unless good thoughts and desires enter deep into the heart, and are there held fast by charity, as by their root, the heat of a contrary lust will scorch them, and make them soon wither away.

7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

The terrestrial world is full of good desires, projects of conversion, and schemes of retreat; but the thorns of secular

lusts make them miscarry. If we do not labour to pluck up these thorns, they will certainly grow up and choke all the divine seed in us.

8. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

The good ground is the good heart; none is such, but through the mercy of God and the grace of Jesus Christ. It was a mercy peculiar to thee, O Lord, to purchase at so dear a rate such barren and accursed ground, full of thorns and briers, and fit only to be burned, that thou mightest make it a rich and blessed soil, fertile in every kind of good fruit. Blind and miserable is that man who attributes this work to himself, and gives not thee the glory of it, O my Saviour!

9. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Who, Lord, has ears to hear thee, except he to whom thou givest, continuest, and openest them; and by whom thou causest thy voice to be heard in a way peculiar to thyself?

10. And the disciples came, and said unto him. Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

Man would always fain know the reason and method of the divine conduct. Let him but thoroughly conceive what it is to be a sinner, and he will then soon understand what he deserves. The very least degree of knowledge is yet more than is due to him who deserves nothing but eternal darkness.

11. He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

Christ, who with scorn refuses to satisfy the crafty and malicious curiosity of the Pharisees, answers that of his disciples, which is plain, innocent, and honest. If faith, which is the fountain and foundation of salvation, be a free gift, which God bestows not upon all, what acknowledgments then are due to him from those who have received it, without deserving it any more than those who have not! The knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is so much neglected by the generality of Christians, that it seems as if they had no concern at all in it, or that it was not worth their pains. Others apply their studies to it, after a manner as entirely

human, and with as little faith and prayer, as if it was not a gift. Let us study it with care, but by the light of faith. God, the master of his own gifts, confers the understanding of his word and mysteries upon whom he pleases. Let us be careful to adore this dreadful election, and to humble ourselves, without desiring to know more.

12. For whomsoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

The use of grace attracts more; faith gives a man the knowledge of the truths of Christianity. But from whence do this use of grace and this faith proceed, but even from grace itself? The less belief, respect, and relish one has for these truths, the more one deserves to be deprived of them. One divine gift prepares us for another: he who, by a holy kind of usury, improves them for his Master, enriches himself.

13. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

Blindness is a punishment of sin, and the source of a great many. Obscurity, which exercises the faith, excites the desires, and increases the prayers of true Christians, serves to punish the incredulity, distaste, and slothfulness of others. In order to profit by the word of God, it is necessary, before we read or hear it, to beg of him the seeing eye and the hearing ear; namely, a heart which may understand and love the truth.

14. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

Let us take warning from the blindness and hardness of these wretches, for fear lest this prophecy should again be fulfilled in us. God makes known his judgments, that they may be avoided; but this knowledge becomes an occasion of condemnation, if men are not the better for it.

15. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

An affection to worldly things, a forgetfulness of divine, a disrelish of God's word, and a spirit of contradiction to his

truths, do generally produce blindness and hardness of heart in Christians, as they did in the Jews. This deplorable condition, wherein the sick person is afraid of being cured, is more common than we imagine. The delighting in all kind of loose and licentious discourse, and shunning all opportunities of hearing that which is pious, is the way by which men arrive at last at stupidity of heart. By opening our eyes to a false light, and to whatever gratifies our senses, passions, and curiosity, and by closing them against the light of the gospel, they at length continue shut against every thing which tends to salvation.

16. But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear.

How much more blessed are those eyes, which, without having ever seen Jesus Christ, see his religion confirmed by his resurrection, by the faith of all people, by the tradition of all ages, by the blood of all the martyrs, by the writings of all the fathers, by miracles of all kinds, and by the lives of all the saints! Men are not thankful enough to God for the favour of being born in an age, country, and family enlightened with the gospel; and for either having never had the prejudices of birth, habit, and example to struggle with, or for having surmounted them.

17. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous *men* have desired to see *those things* which ye see, and have not seen *them;* and to hear *those things* which ye hear, and have not heard them.

How much to be admired are those saints who lived only by faith, by a faith altogether pure, which relied solely upon God, and was destitute of all the supports which ours finds in the wonders of seventeen ages! The more advantages we have above them, the more criminal is our abuse of them, and our baseness the more punishable. Let us be persuaded that it is more profitable for us to see and hear Christ with the eyes and ears of the heart, than with those of the body. Let us by no means envy the Jews this last advantage, which tended only to their condemnation; and let us praise God for having vouchsafed us the first, whereof we were more unworthy perhaps than they.

SECT. II.—THE EXPLICATION OF THE PARABLE.

18. ¶ Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

Hear ye, to whom God is pleased to impart the knowledge of his mysteries, to whom he discovers his truths, to whom no means of instruction in the way of salvation is wanting, while so many others are abandoned to their darkness, to ignorance and error, to seducers and blind guides. Do ye therefore comprehend and value your happiness, love and practise what ye know, and by your life glorify him who bestows so many mercies upon you.

19. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

Who does not perceive, in this description, the generality of the world, and the manner in which they hear the word of God? Contempt, neglect, and want of attention in respect of this word, are greater sins, and more severely punished, than men are apt to think. The heart which will not vouchsafe to hear God, deserves to be delivered up as a prey to the spirit of error. It is the proper and most usual employment of the wicked one, to endeavour to render fruitless all inspirations, truths of the gospel, and divine seed which has been sown in our hearts. Men watch with great care that they may not lose the seed of their ground; but they do not at all regard losing that of their soul.

20. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; 21. Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

We see but too much of these kinds of forwardness, warmth, and joy, on the account of the truths of Christianity and of the word of God, which come to nothing, or to what is next to nothing. The fruit of the word is not to be known except in times of trial, either internal from the conflicts of concupiscence, or external from the tribulations of the world. Let us, but without anxiety, fear lest our fruits should be without root, our beginnings without perseverance, and our works with-

out charity. Lord, grant that I may hear thee, that I may taste thy word, and that I may be thine, not only for a while, but always, even forever!

22. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Whatever inclination a man may have to piety and to Christian truths, the love of riches and worldly things, if it be predominant, ruins all. To rely upon riches is to lie down upon a bed of thorns. To seek for peace amid the cares of the world, is to seek it in the very bosom of inquietude itself. The word cannot bear fruit in a heart possessed with the love of riches, and with a design of raising a fortune in the world.

23. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it;* which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

The seed in the good ground is the word in a faithful heart. To hear, to understand, and to bear fruit, are the three signs of this good ground or faithful heart. There are several degrees of fidelity and holiness; but none without the fruit of good works. To be in the most perfect state is not absolutely necessary, but only to be faithful to God in that to which he is pleased to call us. Convert my heart, O my God, into good ground, and make it bear the fruit which it ought to render thee! Not to render thee all the fruit of thy own seed, is a piece of injustice, ungratefulness, and theft. Lord, preserve me from this guilt by thy grace!

SECT. III.—THE PARABLE OF THE TARES.

24. ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

The church is God's field, which he cultivates by his grace and his ministers, wherein he sows no other than good grain, where none become such but by charity and other Christian virtues, which are the plant and seed of God. What favour, what mercy is it, to be the wheat of God, sown in his field by his own hand! Grant, Lord, that I may therein continue, grow up, and be still fruitful, even till the time of harvest!

25. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

In the church on earth, the wicked are mingled with the righteous; no place but heaven is altogether pure and free from mixture. All societies have their tares; the good grain is not offended nor scandalized at them, but suffers them with patience. Wo to those negligent and drowsy pastors, who let the souls under their care be corrupted by error or sin! Whoever sows these tares in the church, is the enemy of God; and he may, in some manner, be said to sow them who does not hinder the sowing of them. Wake the pastors, O my God, and open their eyes, that they may perceive the tares which choke thy seed!

26. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

When the righteous begin to improve and make a progress in virtue, they then begin to experience the malice of the wicked. Afflictions do not make men wicked, but they show what they are. God does not usually permit his elect to be exposed to the vexation of the wicked, until they are strong enough to undergo the trial of suffering. The mixture of the one with the other is necessary to instruct, purify, and sanctify, and keep the elect in humility.

27. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

Adorable is the divine conduct in this mixture of the good and bad. A faithful and vigilant minister fails not to discover the tares, and to address himself to God by prayer, in order to lament the misfortune before him, to inquire after the cause of it, and receive from him the rules of his behaviour on this occasion. It is under these evils which befall the church, that the zeal and application of a true pastor are fully known.

28. He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

God answers his faithful servants, and informs them concerning the devil's artifices and attempts against his church,

when they apply themselves to him in the way of prayer and pastoral vigilance. The grand enemy of mankind introduces sometimes into the church, and into religious societies, wicked persons, to favour his designs. A zeal, which is rash and precipitate, and not according to knowledge, is as much to be feared as one which is too slow and inactive. But that zeal is commendable which is ruled by God's direction, which does not anticipate his designs, and which is free from all indecent passion. God judges quite otherwise than men of this mixture of the good and evil. He alone knows the good which he intends to produce from it, and how far his patience toward the wicked should extend, in order either to their conversion or condemnation, or to the sanctification of the righteous.

29. But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

Men often persecute a true Christian, while they intend only to prosecute an impious person, for want of giving heed to this prohibition. God spares the wicked, only in consideration of the elect. He will not pass judgment upon the former, until he completes his mercy toward the latter. A zeal for the extirpation of heretics and wicked men, not regulated by these words of our blessed Saviour, allows no time to the one to grow strong in goodness, or to the other to forsake their evil courses. They are of a spirit very opposite to his, who care not if they root up the wheat, provided they can but gather up the tares.

30. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

We ought patiently to bear with the wicked in this life, because it is God's appointment that they should continue mingled with the good to the end of the world. God not only suffers them here, but by his power he makes them instrumental to one onother in promoting his wise designs. For the wickedness of the wicked is so inflamed by the virtue of the good, that, even until their condemnation, they have a gradual increase in sensual desire and wealth, in honour and power; and the virtue of good men improves so much by the

others' wickedness, that they proceed from one degree of grace and piety to another, until their consummation. These two different effects depend upon the justice and mercy of God: upon his justice, which permits and punishes all the evil in the one; upon his mercy, which works and rewards all the good in the other. Do men sufficiently apprehend, what it is to be violently plucked from the earth to which they cleave, to be bound up like a bundle of tares, and cast into eternal fire? And yet to this the temporal felicity of the wicked comes at last. The garner of God is heaven; it is the bosom of God himself. Thither his elect, who are his wheat, are carried, after having been bruised and ground by persecutions in this world, in order to become his bread in eternity, as he will be also eternally theirs.

SECT. IV.—THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED, AND THE LEAVEN.

31. ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

This parable is a representation of the progress of the gospel in the world, of the growth of grace in the soul, and of the establishment of the church, which is founded upon the humility of a God stooping to the form of a servant. This humiliation is the proper mark and character of all his works, ever since his incarnation, as also that of true piety; and it is this virtue, which the ministers, and all the sons of the church, ought to study with the greatest care.

32. Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Truth is depressed in this world, and advanced in the other. The saints find in it their eternal rest, and reap the first-fruits of it in their heart, even here below. The more humble a man is in this life, the more shall he be exalted in the next. These are two characters of the true church, and of the doctrine of the gospel, upon which it is built, to be, according to the order and appointment of their founder, very small in

their beginning, and very extensive in their progress and continuance. Our duty is to aim chiefly at our own abasement; it belongs to God to enlarge and to exalt us. What are, generally speaking, the first impressions of grace, the first motions of faith in the heart, but only a little spark which kindles the fire of charity there, a grain of mustard seed which fills it with its strength and virtue? Let us not neglect and despise any thing.

33. ¶ Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Whatever use we make of our understanding, our will, and our body, without the leaven of faith and charity, is disagreeable and nauseous to God. The divinity united to the human nature in Christ; the gospel diffused throughout the world; the Spirit of God working in a sinner's heart; and the sacramental bread nourishing a Christian soul,—these are the different sorts of leaven which thy wisdom, O my God, has found out, to render man altogether spiritual, to raise him to the love of heavenly things, and to make him bear some resemblance of thyself. How can a heart, so often filled with the wholesome leaven of thy body, O Jesus, still retain its heaviness and inclination toward the earth? Let thy Holy Spirit, I beseech thee, cause mine to rise, to be united and to cleave inseparably to thee!

34. All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

Let us learn from these parables to discover the Christian world in the natural, the former being represented in the latter. Christ descends from invisible mysteries to these visible descriptions and parables, to excite us to raise our minds from these sensible objects to the invisible wonders which are in God and his church.

35. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

The mysteries, which lay hid in God from all eternity, and in types and prophecies from the foundation of the world, are

at length disclosed and fulfilled in and by Jesus Christ. How happy are Christians in being born in the times of manifestation, if they make a good use of this blessing by their faith! Let us leave the covetous wretch to dig to the centre after treasures of no duration, and the naturalist to lose himself in searching into the secrets of nature; the treasures and study of a Christian are Jesus Christ and his mysteries, which he discovers to us by his word. Thou openest thy adorable mouth, O Eternal Wisdom, to instruct me in them; but this is all in vain, unless thou openest my heart, so as to make it thoroughly apprehend them.

36. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

The clear manifestation of gospel truths is only for the true disciples of Christ. In order to understand them fully, it is necessary to recollect ourselves in and with him, by retiring at least into the house of our own heart, to approach him by faith, and to make our addresses to him in prayer. Why does Christ speak in parables, but only to conceal his truths and mysteries from the wise men of the age, to excite the desire of God's children, and to inform them that the knowledge of God and his mysteries is a favour which they must earnestly beg of him?

SECT. V.—THE PARABLE OF THE TARES EXPLAINED.

37. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

Yes, Lord, we acknowledge it with joy, that it is thou alone who formest the saints, and sowest in their hearts all that is good, by a grace which is altogether free. It is thou who performest all this, as Son of man; namely, by the mysterious union of the two natures in thy person, by the merits of thy life and death, by the holiness of thy Spirit, and by the power of thy grace, which is the fruit of the mysteries and sacrifice finished and completed in thy flesh upon the cross.

38. The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one;*

Christian faith and hope oblige us to look upon ourselves

as children of the kingdom of God, provided we live according to his laws and precepts. Can we, then, ever lose sight of a kingdom to which we believe we are appointed? How can our heart but be filled with it, and direct all its thoughts and designs toward it? Here is a dreadful description of a sinner, yet such a one as is true, it being given us by Christ himself. They are no other than tares, who choke the good seed, and hinder it from growing up in the love of truth, and from bringing forth the fruit of charity. Men become "the children of the wicked one," by following his dispositions, and promoting his designs.

39. The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

They imitate the devil, and do his work, who sow like him, and change the good seed into tares, by bad examples, evil counsels, enticements, etc. Let us anticipate the time of the harvest and the coming of the reapers. If we are tares, let us use our utmost endeavours to become good grain.

40. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

The end of every man's life is to him the end of this world; the one, as well as the other, being the end of the time of mercy. My God, what a dismal change will this be, when a sinner, who now lives in honour and pleasure, shall, like a bundle of tares, be cast into the fire!

41. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; 42. And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Eternal separation from the body of Christ, the being cast headlong into the furnace, the torment of everlasting fire, and an endless despair: all this is the just punishment of a fond affection toward the creatures, of the loftiness of pride, of the enjoyment of pleasures, and of the love of worldly satisfactions. How much better is it to weep in this life, having the consolation of hope, than to expose ourselves to the wailings of eternal despair? The true church will not be entirely freed from all occasions of offence till the end of the

world. To separate from it, under pretence of the disorders in it, is to understand neither the nature of the church nor the Scriptures.

43. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

How will the condition of the elect be changed in heaven! Here, they are in obscurity and contempt; there, they will shine forth as the sun. Here, under oppression; there, upon the throne of God himself. Here, in poverty and want; there, in possession of the eternal inheritance of their heavenly Father, and of all the rights of the children of God. To conceive and understand this, requires a very lively faith; and all the misfortune of men proceeds from their not conceiving it. The small number of those who endeavour as they ought to attain to it, shows that this faith is very rare. Let us not cease to request it humbly of God.

SECT. VI.—THE GOSPEL A HIDDEN TREASURE.

44. ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

The effects of a lively faith are, (1.) To make us look upon salvation as our only treasure, and value, beyond all the riches of the world, the grace which causes us to seek after it. (2.) To receive this grace as a free gift which precedes all human endeavour. (3.) To hide it by humility. (4.) To place our whole joy in it. (5.) To give all we have for salvation, and the grace which leads to it. (6.) To be thoroughly sensible that salvation must be bought, and that it is not bestowed for nothing. It is a purchase, because we buy it. It is a grace, because we do not find it to buy, but, as it were, by chance; and because we give nothing for it but what we have received.

SECT. VII.—THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

45. ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls: 46. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

The sloth and indolence of the greatest part of Christians,

with respect to God and their own salvation, are condemned by those merchants who traverse the world, and venture all upon the uncertain prospect of temporal advantage. We must seek, if we would find; we must prefer God before all things, and be disposed to part with them all to secure our own salvation. Wo to him who expects to find any thing more amiable than God, more worthy to fill his heart, and more capable of making him happy!

SECT. VIII.—THE NET CAST INTO THE SEA.

47. ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

The net of God's word, animated by his Spirit, draws souls out of the abyss of sin and error to Christian faith and piety. The use of the word and sacraments is common to all. The net and vessel of the visible church receive indifferently both the good and bad fish, true Christians and hypocrites, the elect and the reprobate. This is neither the time nor the place of distinction; all must continue mixed together till the great day of separation.

48. Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

We must labour in the work of our salvation with humility and fear, yet without anxiety, and in hope; being uncertain what we are in the sight of God. Though a man's being in the church will not infallibly assure him of salvation, yet his being out of it is sufficient to make him [fear that he may] perish irrecoverably. As yet there is time to become good or better. But the moment will come, when all desires and endeavours to this purpose will be attended only with despair. And who knows but that this moment is just at hand?

49. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

What comfort will it be for those who, during this life, have incessantly lamented the afflictions of the church, to see it at length freed forever from the persecution of the wicked, either foreign or domestic! What torment and despair will those feel who have, either with envy or hatred, borne the

sight and company of the righteous, to see themselves separated from them to all eternity! Our faith is very weak, if we can think of this separation without horror. Our love of salvation very faint, if we do not endeavour earnestly to separate ourselves in this world from the wicked, by the holiness of our lives and conversations.

50. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

This is a short description of the pain, grief, and rage of the damned. Happy they, who by godly sorrow and repentance prevent these miseries, having renounced all the pleasures and vain delights of the world! Yet but a moment, and these shall be no more. But this fire and these wailings, after thousands of millions of years, will be still beginning, in order to an endless duration.

51. Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

Let us not slightly pass over these divine truths, if we desire to be the better for them. Let this question of our blessed Lord convince us of their importance. It is very proper, when we read them, to call ourselves to an account, as to the impressions which they make upon our mind and heart, as to the use which our faith makes of them, as to the consequences which we should draw from them for the regulation of our lives, and as to that estrangement from worldly lusts and amusements which they ought to inspire into us.

52. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe, *which is* instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man *that is* a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure *things* new and old.

A small degree of knowledge is not sufficient for a preacher of the gospel. Above all things, he ought perfectly to understand the Holy Scriptures, and to make them his treasure. His knowledge does not consist in being furnished with a great variety of human learning, but in being well versed in whatever concerns the kingdom of heaven, and the art of conducting souls thither. To this the learned ought to direct all their skill in the law and the prophets, their natural talents,

and their attainments in profane arts and sciences; and to make them all subservient thereto. It is not enough for a man to have these advantages in his possession; he must bring them forth out of his treasure, and distribute them abroad. A good pastor will always remember that he must not, like a miser, keep these things to himself, only to please his own fancy; nor yet, like a merchant, traffic with them to enrich himself; but that, like a bountiful father or householder, he must, with a prudent economy, distribute them freely for the good of his family.

SECT. IX.—JESUS DESPISED.—NO PROPHET HONOURED IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.

53. ¶ And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.

There is no time of amusement or vacation in the life of the great Shepherd of our souls; having performed his mission, he retires. This is the pattern which the subordinate pastors, to whom he vouchsafes a share in his ministry, ought to imitate.

54. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this *man* this wisdom, and *these* mighty works?

Those who should know Christ best, are very often most ignorant of him. We must not consider the persons who teach, but the truths which they teach. There is, in minds too carnal with respect to mysteries, an astonishment of contempt, incredulity, and unteachableness, as there is one of reverence, adoration, and joy in souls replenished with faith. O wisdom of the Son of God! O power of the Father! who can at the same time discover thyself to the eyes of reasonable men, and conceal thyself from such as are carnal! My faith owns, adores, and invokes thee, as the uncreated and incarnate wisdom, as the light of angels and men, hid under the obscurity of our flesh, and debased in the proud conceits of the sages of this world!

55. Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56. And

his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this *man* all these things?

Jesus Christ goes among his relations and acquaintance only in order to be despised, whereas men generally do it to be esteemed and caressed by them. The more contemptible thou appearest to carnal eyes, O Jesus, the more worthy I find thee to be adored, loved, and admired, in the dispensation of thy mysteries and the abasement of thy greatness! How glorious is this humiliation of Mary and Joseph, which proceeds only from their union with Jesus Christ! Who would not willingly be his at the same price?

57. And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.

The most holy things are, to carnal men, an occasion of offence. Without faith, and the grace of Jesus Christ, the means of salvation become obstacles to it. The reason of man cannot comprehend how God should vouchsafe to abase himself for his sake. His pride will not own and receive the wisdom of God, unless accompanied with his greatness and glory. But, from the entrance of sin into the world even to the time of the resurrection, the way from God to man, and from man to God, is the humility of Him who is both God and man.

58. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Unbelief, and contempt of the divine word, drive Christ out of the heart, as they did out of his own country. Faith seems to put the almighty power of God into the hands of man; whereas unbelief seems to tie up even the hands of the Almighty. A man, generally speaking, can do but little good among his kinsfolk and relations, because it is difficult for them to look with the eyes of faith upon one whom they have been always used to behold only with those of the flesh.

CHAPTER XIV.

SECT. I.—THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

1. At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, 2. And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

It appears from hence, that the belief of the resurrection was common among the Jews. The holiness of St. John is acknowledged even by his persecutor. It is a dreadful judgment upon men, not to have their eyes open to discover the piety and virtue of a good man, till they have caused his death, either by the sword or by ill-treatment. The miracles of Jesus Christ, owned and acknowledged by Herod, are the condemnation of him, of the Jews, and of unbelievers in all ages. The hardened sinner has his sin for a continual tormentor, and thinks he sees it everywhere before his eyes.

3. ¶ For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put *him* in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

An unchaste person cannot suffer any charitable advice to disturb his pleasures. Such a one sacrifices every thing, be it ever so holy, to his passion. This is what darkens this prince's understanding, and stifles his sentiments of esteem for virtue, and every inclination to good; and it will produce the same effects in every person who gives himself up to it as he did.

4. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

Here is an instance of zeal, fidelity, and courage in an evangelical preacher. How few imitators has this example! Plainness, mildness, and modesty are qualifications to be observed when we are obliged to reprove the great. The best service one can possibly do them is, clearly and plainly to lay before them, without any obscure or intricate discourse, what the law of God requires of them, and what it forbids.

5. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

When only fear restrains the hand without changing the

heart, the sin is committed already in the will, and will soon be produced into act. The people are better judges of holiness than the great. Miserable prince, who fears to offend his people, but is not afraid of offending his God! When a man resists sin by the help of human motives only, he cannot long defend himself.

6. But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

The diversions of the world, feasting and dancing, are but too commonly the occasions of sin. After so fatal an example as this before us, can we in the least doubt whether balls are not snares for souls, destructive of chastity and modesty, and a pernicious invention to awake and excite the passions? Unhappy mother! who exposes her daughter to the shipwreck which herself has suffered, and makes her the instrument of her passion and revenge, and the murderer of a saint! God grant that many mothers may take warning by this example, and have it before their eyes, when they are about to introduce their daughters at court!

7. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.

How dear does it cost a man to resign himself up to his passions! To satisfy one he frequently forgets all the rest. Sometimes war is waged for an inch of ground; at another time, by a foolish and rash promise, half a kingdom is given up to the will of a young coquette; there is nothing but contradiction to be seen in the passions of men. What strange kind of religion is here, for a man to remember God in the midst of sin, to no other end but to make his name subservient thereto by a scandalous oath, instead of thinking of him with a reverential awe, in order to renounce his passion!

8. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John the Baptist's head in a charger.

Impudence and cruelty are the common companions of impurity. How pernicious is the bad education of children, and what a train of evils does it generally draw after it! Men are apt to instruct one another as much and more in

order to sin, than to piety and virtue. A wicked mother does more easily inspire her children with her own corrupt inclinations and passions, than a virtuous one can communicate her good dispositions. How ingenious is carnal wisdom! It knows how to make an unhappy use of the moments of an inflamed passion, and gives it no time to cool or to recover itself.

9. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded *it* to be given *her*.

Religion often serves as a cloak for the greatest crimes. The men of the world sacrifice every thing to human considerations. When a man is blinded by passion, he suffers himself to be brought under the most unjust engagements upon the weakest reasons. By these he thinks to justify himself before men, and, on this very account, he becomes the more guilty before God. How fatal is this regard to men! which plunges Herod in a crime so heinous, and hinders him from finding one faithful servant who might dissuade him from it, and improve the remorse of his conscience in favour of the innocent. This is the poison of the great, the tyrant of their flatterers, and the destruction of the best of men.

10. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. 11. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought *it* to her mother.

There is nothing more revengeful than a lascivious woman when reproved and blamed. A preacher of the gospel has most to fear from this quarter. The first of the profession lost his life for the sake of truth and chastity, that others may learn from hence that all the reward they have to expect in this world, for their faithfulness in the discharge of their office, is to suffer and die with and for Christ; and that it is in the behalf of truth and chastity that they have most occasion at court to show themselves the ministers of God.

12. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

We have a right, as Christians, to open our mind to Jesus Christ, and to comfort ourselves with him in our afflictions, and under the loss of our friends. St. John taught his disci-

ples in his lifetime, that they must, on all occasions, go to Christ; and they profit by this instruction after his decease. This is to them the first fruit and advantage of his death.

SECT. II.—THE MIRACLE OF THE FIVE LOAVES.

13. ¶ When Jesus heard *of it*, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard *thereof*, they followed him on foot out of the cities.

A man ought prudently to withdraw himself from the rage of the wicked, and, by retiring, yield to the storm, according to this example of Christ, who did it only for the instruction of his ministers and servants. The farther he seems to remove from us, the more diligently ought we to endeavour to follow and to find him.

14. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

How exceeding great must the tenderness and compassion of Christ's heart be toward diseased souls, when he discovers so much in relation to the distempers of the body! The sovereign Pastor shows not the least uneasiness, though the people will not let him enjoy that repose which he came on purpose to seek in the desert. That must be relinquished when necessity requires, and an opportunity of doing good presents itself. We ought to have abundance of pity and compassion on diseased souls, to anticipate them, and, as it were, go forth to meet their weaknesses.

15. ¶ And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

The charity of the apostles is very mindful of the people's wants; a man is not worthy to succeed them if he do not imitate them. Human prudence should think only of human means, when God has not revealed any extraordinary design. He leaves the want to be taken notice of and considered, on purpose to render the miracle more illustrious and useful. How wonderful is the zeal of these poor people, who, through the comfort of being with Christ and enjoying his presence, are forgetful of their own necessities! When the soul is either

well replenished with God, or very hungry after his word, it is very little sensible of the needs and hunger of the body.

16. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

A bishop and a priest seem obliged to attempt impossibilities, in order to feed the poor, and to serve and assist souls. It is not their own stock, but that of Christ alone, wherein they must expect to find enough to give to the souls under their care. He who puts his trust in him, has a treasure which is inexhaustible, and always at hand.

17. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

The acknowledgment of our own indigence is a great qualification for the divine gifts, and is itself one of them. What store soever of parts and knowledge a minister of Christ may think he possesses, yet he has still occasion for more.

18. He said, Bring them hither to me.

It is an instance of charity and obedience truly apostolical, for a man, where there is a very great necessity, to give his whole subsistence for the support of others, reserving nothing to himself but a dependence on the treasures of Providence. Let us carry our poverty to Christ, and it will become in his hands an abundance of wealth.

19. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to *his* disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

This transaction is a representation of the consecration and communion of the eucharist. Humility, which is a principal disposition in order to approach it, is represented by the people's sitting down on the grass. It is just and reasonable to thank God for good things already received, before new are asked of him. The looking up to heaven is a token, both of acknowledgment of having received all from God, and of trust in expecting all from him. The blessing of Jesus Christ is powerful and efficacious. It is to tempt God to depend upon receiving whatever is necessary to salvation immediately from Christ himself, because he gives it generally by the means of

his ministers. How many graces pass through their hands! It is their sanctification, as well as that of others, if they know how to make a good use of this advantage.

20. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. 21. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

Little or much is the same thing in the hand of Jesus Christ. The more a man gives to the poor, the more he is enriched one way or another. The feeding and filling this people by the multiplication of loaves, is an emblem of the holy communion, which is a source of graces and spiritual riches to those souls which are truly filled and nourished by it; but it is one thing to eat it, and another to be truly nourished thereby.

22. ¶ And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

A person who is really humble does not continue willingly, or without necessity, in a place where he has done some remarkable good. That man runs the risk of losing his reward from God who awaits for the applause of men. How difficult is it to withstand this inclination, and what need is there of a very powerful and constraining grace in order to do it! Jesus Christ makes haste to send away his disciples from a near occasion of vanity and complacency, for he fully knows the danger.

SECT. III.—PRAYER.—CHRIST AND PETER WALKING ON THE SEA.

23. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

Jesus parts from his disciples in order to give them some mortification, to keep them from adhering to him with too human an inclination on the account of this new miracle, and to suppress in them all vain joy, by their grief at his departure. The proper dispositions and circumstances for praying well, are, (1.) Retirement from the world. (2.) Elevation

of heart. (3.) Solitude. (4.) The silence and quiet of the night.

24. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

There is no manner of calm where Christ is not. This is a representation of the present life, which is a state of continual temptation. The church is like a ship in the midst of the sea of this world. Her ministers are continually exposed to the storms of persecution. He who is not prepared to be tossed with waves, knows not to what he is called. The contrary wind of persecution proves a favourable one in the end, which brings Jesus Christ along, and carries the ship safe into the haven.

25. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

Christ comes to all his disciples in the time of trouble and temptation. He will not abandon his church or his ministers, who are, by his appointment, and by their calling, exposed to the vexation of the world. He will work a miracle for their relief, rather than forsake them, when they put their whole trust and confidence in him. Here are three miracles in one: (1.) He knows their distress. (2.) He finds them out in the midst of darkness. (3.) He walks upon the sea. Salvation is often near, when nothing but darkness and destruction are before us. Whoever, when he seems most forsaken, still hopes against all appearance, may truly say that he is not forsaken. It is by the favour of this kind of night that Jesus comes to us.

26. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

The righteous are often troubled and startled at the effects of grace, and take them for illusions; as, on the contrary, these are frequently taken for the operations of God's Spirit. In all extraordinary cases, it is necessary to begin by fear and distrust, and then to consider and examine them. Humility is undaunted only in matters of faith, whereas presumption is bold in every thing which flatters its vanity.

27. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

Christ, by his word and illumination, causes those who are his to discern what proceeds from the good Spirit. It is he who works in their heart that trust and confidence which he requires of them. His word in his church gives sufficient evidence of his presence. Speak, Lord, this powerful and efficacious word, "It is I," to the heart of such as still doubt whether it is thou who speakest in thy Scriptures and church, who workest by thy grace and ministers, who art present in heaven and the holy eucharist; and their incredulity will forthwith be changed into faith.

28. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

An imperfect faith requires signs and wonders; that which is perfect is satisfied with Christ's word alone. When he inspires this confidence in asking, it is because he designs to enable us to perform what he is about to command. We see, in this expression of St. Peter, the character of a generous soul ready to undertake any thing for the sake of God. This confidence proceeds from grace, when charity and humility are the foundation thereof.

29. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

See here a fourth miracle, in the strange power of obedience to Christ's word. To walk on the water to go to Jesus, is to follow him and to do his will, notwithstanding all troubles and losses, contradictions and persecutions of carnal men. Lord, say to my soul, Come; and it will then go to thee, and do whatever thou wouldst have it, without the least apprehension from the world.

30. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

A persevering faith is very rare in the world. Upon every new danger and temptation, there is new want of grace, and new necessity for prayer. It is of great advantage to a Christian for God to make him sensible, from time to time, of his

natural weakness and inability, that he may still have recourse to his Saviour. Temptation in the elect serves to awake their faith. Not one moment passes, but we have occasion to say, "Lord, save me."

31. And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

Here are a fifth and sixth miracle: Jesus holds Peter up in the midst of the water, and knows the bottom of his heart. Let us take great care that we do not, like St. Peter, consider more the danger in which we are, than the power of Christ; such a piece of infidelity would make us deserve to be left entirely to ourselves. His word is our light; his hand, our strength. He permits his elect to fall, only in order to humble them; and by raising them up, to increase their faith and gratitude.

32. And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

This is a seventh miracle. As soon as ever Christ enters into a heart, the wind of temptation, vanity, and uneasiness ceases to disturb it. St. John mentions an eighth miracle on this occasion, (chap. vi. 21.) Wherever Christ is, there is rest. The ship represents the church, which is the house of faith, of peace, and of God himself, but continually subject to be tossed to and fro in this world. Command the winds which toss it to cease, O my God; for thou hast full and absolute power over them

33. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

A confidence to approach Christ, a spirit of adoration, and a confirmation in the belief of his divinity, are three effects, which the reading (as well as seeing) these miracles ought to produce in us. These miracles alone drew from those who were present at them a confession of Christ's divinity; and yet some presume to doubt of it now, after all the miracles of his life, death, and resurrection, after the wonders of seventeen ages, and the belief of all nations.

SECT. IV.—THE HEM OF CHRIST'S GARMENT.

34. ¶ And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. 35. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased;

How many are there of those who seek God only for the sake of life, health, and temporal conveniences? Christ rejects none here, that he may teach his ministers to use their utmost endeavours to cure all sinners who apply themselves to them. Where can one find that zeal for the eternal salvation of the soul, which equals this diligence in seeking after the temporal health of the body? He who really loves his neighbour, never grows weary of exhorting sinners to go to Christ. We ought at least to present, and as it were to lay them before God in prayer, when we have no other means of assisting them.

36. And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

What mighty influence must the grace and Spirit of Christ necessarily have on the mind, when the very hem of his garment has so much on the body! A man always finds much good by resigning himself up entirely to him. Every thing is sanctifying in him through the virtue of his divinity. Let us by a lively faith touch the mysteries of his mortal life, and that even to the least actions and circumstances of these mysteries wrought on earth; this is a source of a great many graces, and of salvation itself. How much more then is it so, to adore our blessed Saviour, and as it were to receive into our heart his body and blood, and to feed on him with faith, confidence, and humility!

CHAPTER XV.

SECT. I.—UNWASHEN HANDS.—HUMAN TRADITIONS.

1. Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, 2. Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

The fondness which men generally have for their own inventions, for ancient errors, and superstitious devotions, is a continual source of calumnies, rash judgments, persecutions against good men, and of great disturbances in the church. The disciples of Jesus Christ must expect to be treated as their Master was. Why, instead of praising God, and being edified by the labours of pastors, should a man be intent only on discovering in them occasions to decry them and make them odious? It is because a Pharisee takes more pleasure in blaming others, than in amending himself.

3. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?

The pretender to zeal often prefers and opposes superstitious usages to the divine law and the essential duties of Christianity. Strange depravity of men's hearts, who think to honour God by transgressing his commandment, and doing their own will! The world is full of zealots of this kind, who neglect their duty to follow human inventions. To oppose these abuses is to imitate Christ, provided a man do it with mildness and modesty; not insulting, but instructing; not merely to gain the victory, but to gain over souls to God. He who does it by his Spirit, still does it after this manner.

4. For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.

Obedience to the fathers and pastors of our souls, and to sovereign princes, is no less enjoined by this commandment, than piety toward the fathers of our flesh. Whoever pretends to release and withdraw us from their government and

direction, is a seducer and transgressor of God's law, how much holiness soever he may seem to have.

5. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is* a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me;

Religion often serves as a cloak for impiety, hard-heartedness to the poor, and indifference toward parents. It is not uncommon for spiritual fathers to want almost necessaries, by reason that men, through a false devotion, or by an irregular charity, or at the importunity of some person, bestow that otherwise which is in justice due to them. We cannot possibly please God by gifts offered contrary to his law or his Spirit; it is sacrilege to dedicate that to him which is taken away from the piety which nature inspires, and the divine law enjoins. This is, as much as in us lies, to invalidate our Saviour's declaration, that he accepts as done to himself the good which is done to the least of his disciples.

6. And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free.* Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.

It is an infallible sign that our devotion is false, if it contradict any divine command or essential obligation; as it is certainly true, if it contribute to the observation of them. God grant there may not be many who "make the commandment of God of none effect," by means of suggested wills and extorted donations, whereby they exclude their poor relations from inheritances belonging to them. Let us, with the greatest care and readiness, assist the poor, and especially our poor relations, since Christ himself assures us that it is a work preferable to all pious legacies and endowments.

7. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8. This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.

A known hypocrite deserves not in the least to be used gently. Nothing is due to a reputation unjustly acquired. It is not evil-speaking, but an act of public charity, to expose the hypocrisy of a seducer. Outward worship is nothing without the inward. It is in the heart, and by the religion thereof, that God is honoured. True piety consists in the

union of the heart with God; this is what we must labour to accomplish.

9. But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

This is a terrible sentence against those who introduce, and keep up in the church, devotions which are superstitious and altogether human; and who, by their excessive indulgence, flatter the sinner's sloth, keep him under a false peace and fatal security, amuse him, and make him neglect the laws of God. Such are no other than the devil's ministers and agents, to seduce those who have some principle of religion, and to render all their inclinations to piety ineffectual. Their good intention will not save them. In vain do they worship God, says Jesus Christ.

10. ¶ And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:

The teachers of the superstitious and pharisaical devotion are scarcely ever brought off from it. Jesus leaves them, and applies himself to the people, in order to undeceive them, by instructing them. We must imitate our blessed Saviour in this, using our endeavours to instruct the people in true piety, and to undeceive them as to the false.

11. Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

It is a rule of great importance, and full of instruction and comfort to souls which seek God, that no sin, no defilement can arise from any thing but the will; as nothing sanctifies us but what comes from the heart. Whatever proceeds from the concupiscence of the heart, is evil; and whatever does not, cannot but be good. It is not that which enters into the mouth, which defiles even him who sins in eating and drinking to excess; but the will and disposition of the heart, which inclines him to transgress the divine law.

SECT. II.—GIVING OFFENCE TO PHARISEES NOT TO BE REGARDED.—BLIND GUIDES.—WHAT DEFILETH A MAN.

12. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

Truth offends those who have the spirit of a Pharisee. One

can scarcely ever touch upon the passions of men, without provoking them. The proud person will neither be humbled for his faults, nor receive instruction to amend them, nor suffer others to be taught those truths which he does not like himself. This is the scandal or offence proper to a Pharisee, which we must neglect and despise.

13. But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

That which is not of God, cannot stand and continue. The wicked are of no account in his sight. They are the thorns and briers of his field, as well as their maxims, traditions, and customs. Whoever has not the spirit of children, which is love, is no plant of the heavenly Father's planting.

14. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

Wo to blind guides, who damn themselves and those whom they lead! What is such a blind guide as this, but one who is so fond of human traditions, external devotions, and superficial performances, that they become, even contrary to his intention, a hinderance to the observation of God's law? The blindness which proceeds from pride, envy, and obstinacy, is the most dangerous and damnable.

15. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. 16. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?

Alas! how many are there who pass for spiritual, and who seem to have studied a long time in the school of Christ, to whom the purity of his worship and religion is still a perfect riddle and parable! The true knowledge of the spirit of the gospel is a thing more rare and uncommon than we imagine among the generality of Christians, and even of the learned.

17. Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? 18. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

How necessary is it to watch over the heart, since that moves the tongue, and is the fountain of all human corruption! It is according to what we are in the inmost recesses of the heart, that we are either righteous or wicked, that we belong

either to God or the world, either to Christ or the devil; and it is according to the state and condition of our will that we shall be judged. The regulation of this heart, and the reformation of this will, demand our chiefest care; the rest follows their disposition. Lord, from thee I expect to receive this vigilance and application. Thou alone art the light, the strength, and the life of my heart.

19. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Man has in his heart the principle and seed of all kinds of sin; and he finds only in the heart of Jesus Christ the principle of the contrary virtues. Of himself, he is nothing but a sinner; by grace and mercy he becomes righteous. Yes, O my God, whatever good I do, and whatever evil I avoid, it is entirely owing to thee alone.

20. These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

Christian liberty in external things has no bounds or limits but the law of God, the ordinances of the church, and the edification of our neighbour; but we must take care not to abuse this liberty, and make it an occasion of licentiousness. Abundance of persons would make a scruple of going to the communion without having washed their hands, who make none at all of doing it without having washed their conscience from habits of vanity, evil-speaking, luxury, and wantonness. If a man do not chiefly mind the spirit of religion, he disorders and confounds every thing in it; he makes religious actions of such as are common and indifferent; and that which is most sacred and holy, he performs out of custom and as it were by rote, traffics with it, makes it subservient to his passions and interest, and abuses it a thousand other ways.

SECT. III.—THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

21. ¶ Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

This journey of our blessed Saviour seems to be taken without any particular design; and perhaps it was only for the sake of this one soul, since he leaves the place as soon as ever

he has healed it. So wonderful is the goodness and kindness of the Son of God toward souls! One alone ought to be dear to a true pastor, and deserves his whole care and application, how despicable soever it may appear.

22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

We see here, in this woman, the picture of a sinner deeply sensible of the misery of his soul, and truly penitent. Such a one ought to begin, by removing from the occasions of sin, by turning toward his Saviour, putting his whole trust in him, and praying heartily to him. How proper is this prayer for a penitent! It is short, humble, full of faith, fervent, respectful, rational, relying only upon God's mercy, modest, persevering, and not presuming to prescribe to God. Can he, who looks upon himself as a slave of the devil, beg with too much earnestness to be delivered?

23. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

This woman's faith first causes her to pray, and then her prayer, adding strength to her faith, makes her capable of undergoing the trial of a slighting silence, an express refusal, and a treatment in appearance somewhat hard and injurious. It is such a faith as this, which should make us cry incessantly after our deliverer. The sinner does well to apprehend his own unworthiness.

24. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jesus Christ being promised only to the Jews, for the time of his mortal life, and being their proper apostle, it is with some difficulty that he extends his mission to others. How edifying is this reservedness; and how commendable is it for a man to imitate it, by confining himself as much as possible within the limits of his calling! A pastor ought by no means to apply himself out of self-love to such souls as belong to God already, neglecting to seek after the lost sheep, which cannot of themselves return into the way. This is a conduct to be dreaded.

25. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

Let us never cease to pray, and to humble ourselves before God, though he seem to despise our humility, and to reject our prayers. A true penitent is not discouraged by the severity which God shows toward him; he knows that he deserves it. The more submissive he is to the divine pleasure, the nearer does his faith bring him to God, humbles him the more in his sight, and inspires him with greater confidence to make his addresses to, and to expect assistance from him. According as these virtues increase in a soul, the spirit of repentance grows and increases in it.

26. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs.

Favours are for children, and love only renders us such. It is through mercy that God makes the sinner sensible from whence he is fallen, what he is become, and to what he should aspire. Jesus instructs by humbling; his repulses speak to those who can understand their language. It is thou thyself, O Jesus, who art the children's bread; and who turnest even dogs into children of God, that thou mayest feed them with thyself. I know indeed my own misery and unworthiness, but I know also thy mercy, and the power of thy grace.

27. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

True faith consents to all the denials and severities which come from God, but at the same time makes use of them to raise, unite, and fasten itself more strongly to him. When a man sincerely desires to be saved, he is discouraged by no difficulties, but, on the contrary, changes even obstacles into means. God defers sometimes to show mercy, on purpose by delay to increase desire; by desire, hope; by hope, the fervency of prayer; and by prayer, humility. God loves the earnestness and importunity of prayer; and at length grants every thing to a persevering hope, which grows the stronger by being humbled and refused.

28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great *is* thy

faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Faith remains victorious at the last, triumphs, as it were, over God himself, and, by a holy violence, wrests out of his hands what he seemed determined not to bestow. Jesus admires this faith, to the end that we may admire and imitate it, and may reap the same fruits and advantages from it. O woman, great indeed is thy faith! but, O my God, much greater is thy mercy! because this great faith is the gift thereof. Faith is the foundation of the whole Christian building; but the foundation, as well as the building, is the work of God. Faith, and the desire to belong entirely to God, increase equally together in a penitent's heart, and his cure is answerable to them both. This is wrought in a moment, but the sinner is not so suddenly prepared for it.

SECT. IV.—MANY HEALED.—THE MIRACLE OF THE SEVEN LOAVES.

29. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. 30. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them *those that were* lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

That which we have here to imitate, is to follow Christ up into the mountain, by raising our minds to him in prayer, and humbly representing at his feet our inability to go to him, to know him, to pray to him, and to act for him. Shall Christians then be less eager and forward to go to him, on the account of the diseases of their souls, than these Jews for those of their bodies? Let us but love eternal life, as much as they did the present, and we shall then be willing to spare our pains no more than they. Lord, God, and Saviour of my heart, give me feet, eyes, tongue, and health of heart, that I may run after thee, know thee, praise thee, worship thee, and love thee!

31. Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

It is a great matter for a man to be very careful to ascribe

to God all the graces, talents, and degrees of knowledge which he enjoys, and to thank him for them. Blessed be thou, O my God, for having loosed the tongue of so many sinners to confess their sins; restored their feet, to walk in thy ways; and opened their eyes, to see and know thy truth. Complete these miracles of thy grace in me. Perform them in all those who are still in darkness and corruption.

32. ¶ Then Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

There are few so faithful in seeking and following Christ as to forget even the necessaries of life. This is peculiar to his true disciples. He is mindful of their wants himself, when they seek before all things the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Jesus Christ, his grace, his word, and his body, are the true bread, without which they would find themselves without strength, and faint in the way to heaven. He does not think of feeding, till after he has healed them; and they submit themselves to his guidance and direction, without asking any thing but health and instruction. The conduct of Christ, and the behaviour of this people, are the pattern of a wise spiritual director, and of a well-disposed penitent. In the one, there must be tenderness, compassion, and mindfulness of what is wanting; in the other, confidence, docility, patience, and perseverance.

33. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

Human foresight is very short even in the saints; it must be supplied by faith. It is the way of the divine wisdom to make men thoroughly perceive the greatness of their want, and the necessity of extraordinary succour, before it vouchsafes to afford it. The world is a wilderness, where nothing is capable of satisfying the heart of man, except Jesus Christ. No, Lord, we shall never fear dying of hunger here, so long as by our faith we can seek, find, possess, and feed upon thee.

34. And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

Jesus does not inquire in order to be informed, but to make

the necessity more apparent. It is a gift of God to reflect upon our own indigence; it is a greater, thoroughly to understand it, to be convinced of it, to be humbled by it, and to value the grace of our blessed Saviour the more on this account. What have we of ourselves to sustain and feed us in this life? What have we not by and in thee, O Jesus, and in thy church, while those who are out of it perish with hunger?

35. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

Every one of us ought to receive the gifts of God in humiliation of heart, and in the repose, at least, of inward retirement. Humility is a principal qualification for the receiving Christ worthily. He here gives us a representation of it.

36. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake *them*, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

We must return thanks to God, not only when we receive his gifts ourselves, but also when we distribute them to others. God alone gives without receiving; Jesus Christ himself gives thanks to his Father, because the human nature, even in the only Son of God, has nothing but what it received. The supreme Pastor authorizes inferior pastors. It is by their ministry and conveyance that he bestows his graces; and whereby, according to his appointment, instruction and the sacraments are to be received. They have nothing to confer but what comes from him. He it is who breaks the bread of the word, who gives the true sense of it, and all the dispositions and qualifications which are necessary to our improvement by his other gifts; but this he does by the ministry of the pastors of his church.

37. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left seven baskets full.

We are not truly filled but only when God himself feeds us. It is not enough barely to eat—it is necessary also to be filled. Thou knowest, O my God, how very few there are who are fed and filled with thy word, and with the flesh and blood of thy sacrifice, though all truly eat at thy table (that which is a lively representation of) the latter, and read the former in thy Scriptures! Suffer not this abuse in me. The more we

communicate the gifts of God to our neighbour, the more they abound in ourselves. To distribute and disperse by charity, our spiritual as well as temporal goods, is to sow in order to reap.

38. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

Christ often gives to the charity which men have for the poor, the grace of multiplying their alms. When a man depends upon Providence, which sees and can do all things, he is not in the least afraid that his stock will be exhausted by the multitude of the poor, and of their wants, either bodily or spiritual. Let masters of families learn from this place to trust to Providence, how numerous soever their families may be.

39. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

It is neither inconstancy nor curiosity which makes Christ remove from one region to another, but humility, charity, and the appointment of God his Father. It is an action worthy of a true disciple of Christ to withdraw from a place where he has done some remarkable good, in order to go and do more in one where he is not known.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECT. I.—A SIGN DESIRED AND REFUSED.

1. The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.

Wicked men and heretics, who are at so little agreement among themselves, unite always in opposing Jesus Christ, his church, or his truth. Strange is the malignity of envy, which would engage virtuous persons in good works on purpose to take occasion, even from thence, to asperse them! It is an irregularity and corruption which is but too common, for men not to apply themselves to consider and observe the wonders of God and the miracles of Christ, and yet to have the presumption to desire more! This is a piece of ingratitude; and

nothing deserves more to be rejected of God than the desires and prayers of the ungrateful.

2. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be* fair weather: for the sky is red. 3. And in the morning, *It will be* foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering.

Man is too curious about natural, and too little concerned about supernatural things; and yet upon these latter eternal salvation depends.

O *ye* hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not *discern* the signs of the times? 4. A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign: and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

Man has abundance of application and foresight as to his temporal affairs, none as to his salvation! His curiosity to discern human events is very great, but he is not at all curious in observing divine prophecies, and the times appointed for the accomplishment of the mysteries of salvation! God forsakes with scorn the double and dissembling soul, but takes pleasure in instructing the simple and sincere. Christ had wrought miracles enough to prove his mission and divinity; that of his resurrection, typified in Jonas, was the only one remaining necessary, to take away the scandal of his cross and death, to fulfil and justify the Scriptures, and to establish the Christian religion, of which Jesus raised from the dead is the eternal Priest and the Sacrifice, now glorified and become immortal in heaven.

SECT. II.—THE LEAVEN OF DOCTRINE.—THE APOSTLES REPROVED.

5. And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. 6. ¶ Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Happy he, who is so intent on following Christ, as to forget even his bodily necessities. When we have once tasted him, we should not suffer ourselves to be much employed about earthly things. How few are there who take care to keep themselves entirely free from the pride, envy, and hypocrisy of the Pharisees! It is against these spiritual and contagious vices that those ought particularly to guard who pass

for learned, devout, and spiritual, and for persons of an austere and singular life. Unmindfulness of the other life and eternal salvation is the leaven of the Sadducees, who believed neither the immortality of the soul nor the resurrection of the body. The expectation of eternal happiness, humility, and Christian simplicity are the leaven of Jesus Christ, opposed to that of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Fill us with this, O Lord, out of thy fulness!

7. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is* because we have taken no bread.

How great is the wretchedness of man, who is at all times sooner sensible of bodily wants than of those of the soul! How great the infirmity and weakness of those whom the Holy Ghost had not yet renewed, to fear wanting bread, after the two late miracles of the five thousand fed with five barley loaves, and the four thousand fed with seven; and to imagine they could be defiled by material leaven, when they had been so particularly instructed concerning the things which could alone defile a man! These defects in the apostles themselves, plainly show the universal necessity of God's grace, in order to understand, retain, love, and practise his instructions.

8. *Which* when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?

Want of faith is the cause of men being wholly taken up about the wants of the body, and the source of most of their vices. As Jesus, among all the virtues, praises faith most frequently, so he very often blames the weakness of it; because a lively faith draws after it all the rest, and because nothing can supply the defect of it.

9. Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? 10. Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

Men easily forget the divine benefits. If they are so forgetful of such as respect the body, notwithstanding the quick sense they have of its wants, how much more apt are they to forget such as respect the soul! They who are the ministers of these receive great advantage from them, if they discharge their ministry as they ought. They sanctify themselves while

they sanctify others; and are fed and nourished by those truths which they dispense to them. Jesus, in providing for the present needs of the people, provides also for the future needs of his disciples. This condemns those who grudge what is necessary to pastors and ministers of the word.

11. How is it that ye do not understand that I spake *it* not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

With how much difficulty do the sons of Adam apply their minds to heavenly things, and how hardly do they understand them! God permits this dimness and inadvertency in the first pastors, that they may not forget that light and attention are his gifts, that they may have compassion and patience toward those who have not yet received them, and teach them to beg them of him as matters of pure grace and favour.

12. Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

God only knows how to reprove in such a manner as to open the eyes. A loose kind of morality is a sort of leaven, which, proceeding from the corruption of the heart, depraves and corrupts a whole people, and diffuses itself everywhere in a little time. Here are two sects, and both opposite to the Christian morality: the one of the Pharisees, who, minding only external performances, and such things as draw after them esteem and reputation, destroy charity and humility, which are the very soul of religion; the other of the Sadducees, who, believing no other felicity but what depends upon the good things of this life, become the flatterers and slaves of those who can bestow them, and in whose hands worldly prosperity is chiefly lodged. Would to God that these sects were expired and dead with the Pharisees and Sadducees, and that we did not sometimes see them revived and reunited among Christians!

SECT. III.—THE CONFESSION OF ST. PETER.

13. ¶ When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?

Christ, by taking the mean and humble appellation of "Son

of man," confounds the vanity of men, who are so apt to be puffed up with their great titles. It is neither out of idleness, curiosity, nor pride, that he inquires concerning what the world says of him, but through a necessity of instructing his disciples, and obviating false reports. It is useful for pastors to know the false notions of religion which are spread among the people, that they may be able to put a stop to them. Ought not Christians to imitate their Master, who concerns not himself about the news of the world, but only so far as it relates to his ministry and to religion?

14. And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

Thus an irregular affection divides the minds of men in favour sometimes of one person, sometimes of another. It is another corruption to attribute to saints prerogatives which belong only to Christ. Men are always mistaken and lose their way, when, in discoursing on religious subjects, they follow the conjectures of human reason, instead of being guided by the word of God. Truth is but one; error is infinite.

15. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

St. Peter answers for and in the name of all. Only one speaks, to denote the unity of the faith and of the apostleship, as well as of the church and of the person of Jesus Christ. This would have been nothing new, if he had not been the Son of God by nature, but only by adoption; nothing extraordinary, if he had not been the Christ, that is, anointed with the divinity itself, but only with grace, like other kings, priests, and prophets. I adore and confess thee, O Jesus, as true God and true man, Son of God and Son of man,—conserving in the unity of thy divine person the properties of thy two natures! Christ is the Son of the living God; Christians are the children of a dying God!

17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

The saving knowledge of Christ can come only from God. A man must not cease to beg it of him, how knowing soever

he may be. No advantages of birth, nor natural talents, nor wealth, nor power, nor honours, compose the happiness of man; but the riches of grace, and the love whereby the Father chose us from all eternity, in order to sanctify and glorify us in his only Son by the means of faith. Blessed is he who spends his life, not in the pursuit of such knowledge as flesh and blood can bestow, but in the study and love of Jesus Christ!

18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

This particular application to St. Peter is the reward of his faith. His power, strength, and apostolical grace in founding the church, is included in his name. This he receives from Christ, to show that he receives the other also from him. The church is immovable and eternal, because the faith which is the foundation of it is firm and unchangeable.

19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The power to remit all sins is given to the church, to show that this power is not to be found out of the unity of the church. This power is abused when it is used contrary to the design of Christ who gave it. As nothing but sin shuts the kingdom of heaven against men, so by remission of sin it is opened to them. The church binds by excommunication, and by the refusal or delay of absolution; and God ratifies in heaven the judgment of his ministers on earth, when they judge according to the rules prescribed by his word. God preserve us from such cowardly or ignorant ministers as know not what it is to bind sinners!

SECT. IV.—PETER REBUKED.

20. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

This was the time of Christ's mission to the Jews. None could enter into it until after his death and resurrection, and the mission of the Holy Ghost. It was necessary that he should be sacrificed for the truth, before men could expose

themselves to be sacrificed for the sake thereof. Let us learn from hence, not to discover to the world the great truths of religion, except with prudence, and according to the direction of God.

21. ¶ From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Christ's death without the belief of his divinity, is a matter of scandal and offence. Three sorts of persons generally persecute Christ: the rich of the world, covetous or ambitious ecclesiastics, and conceited scholars. The whole knowledge of Jesus Christ is comprehended under his life of sufferings, his sacrifice on the cross, and his life restored to him again. The spirit of Christianity disposes a man to bear life with patience, to receive death with joy, and with faith to expect the resurrection and the life of the world to come.

22. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Man, blind as he is, is always ready to find fault with the conduct of God, and to judge of his ways and designs. Human reason cannot comprehend that it is necessary to be crucified in this world; much less can it reconcile the belief of Christ's incarnation and divinity with his sufferings and death. The more what he has done and suffered for us is above the reach of our understanding, the more adorable also is his wisdom and love; and the more unbounded, and without reserve, ought our gratitude and fidelity to be.

23. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Whoever is against the cross of Christ becomes his enemy. Nothing was in appearance more reasonable than these human sentiments; but how contrary are they to those of faith! Peter, who but this moment was blessed and enlightened by God, falls back on a sudden into the darkness of human reason, and becomes an adversary and an offence to Jesus Christ himself. Let us from hence learn the difference which

there is between man when assisted by grace, and when left to himself. Let us continue humble under that light and strength which may be taken from us in a moment. Let us look upon every person whatever as our enemy, who attempts to divert us from the ways of God. False friendship and carnal tenderness can inspire us with none but human affections, and such as are contrary to the love of mortification and the cross.

SECT. V.—THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

24. ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

The principles of the Christian life are, First, To have a sincere desire to belong to Christ. Secondly, To renounce the inclinations of self-love. Thirdly, To embrace the condition which God has appointed for us, to perform the obligations of it, and to undergo the troubles which we meet with in it, and the contradictions and oppositions of men. Fourthly, To do all in the spirit of Christ, and to imitate him. Abundance of people glory in professing to follow him, but very few comply with what he requires in order thereto. A man, when full of himself and void of God, is but a burden to himself; whereas he is in a condition to walk very fast toward heaven when he is filled with God, and has taken up the cross of Christ. This is a paradox, which to the spirit of man is incomprehensible; but thine, O Jesus, makes thy true disciples easily comprehend, love, and put in practice.

25. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

A fifth principle of the Christian life is, to wean ourselves from the love of the present life and of all the conveniences of it. A sixth is, to have eternity always before our eyes. The great occasion of the loss of souls is, that men are mindful only of this life, and wholly taken up with the care how to enjoy it in honour, convenience, and abundance. That man who neglects all these things, and who, for thy sake, O my Saviour, despises life itself, is he who shall certainly find it.

26. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

A seventh principle is, to consider frequently that all things are unprofitable to one who loses his own soul. An eighth, that this loss is eternally irreparable. At the time of death, there is nothing in the world which a man would not willingly give for salvation; during life and health, he does not so much as think of it. While he is able, he will do nothing at all; and he would fain do all, when he is no longer able to do any thing. What strange delusion is this! Will mankind never recover from it, after so many fatal examples?

27. For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

A ninth principle of the Christian life is, frequently to exercise our faith upon the last judgment; and to beseech God to give us a salutary dread and apprehension of it. That we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, follow Christ, and be ready to lose our lives for his sake, are not matters of bare advice or counsel, but an indispensable law; since according to the performance or omission of these works we shall be judged. Those who will not acknowledge the necessity of works, shall find it at that dreadful tribunal. The glorious coming of Christ at the end of the world is a truth in religion generally known, yet that whereon men do not sufficiently exercise their faith, their fear, and their love.

28. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

In the last place, a tenth principle of the Christian life is, to encourage ourselves with the hope and expectation of that glory which Christ has prepared for those who suffer with and for him. A specimen of this was seen by three apostles on the holy mountain,—and every one of them beheld him glorious after his resurrection; but that which we all see of his glory in the Scriptures, and of the reign of his Spirit in the world, is more certain than any other knowledge, even than that which the apostles had at his transfiguration.

CHAPTER XVII.

SECT. I.—THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST.—ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CALLED ELIAS.

1. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart,

Jesus discovers his glory on Mount Tabor to none but those whom he designs should be witnesses of his agonies on the Mount of Olives. Few understand these mysteries by a lively and true Christian faith. In order so to do, and to live by the belief of them, it is necessary for a man to withdraw from the world, to raise himself from the earth by prayer, and to follow Christ in imitating his example. God advances whom he thinks fit to extraordinary favours. He makes a distinction even among the apostles as to these, to show that he is master of his own gifts, and that no one ought to be jealous of the advantages of his colleagues.

2. And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

Christ prepares his disciples for sufferings, and kindles in them the desire of eternal happiness, by giving them proper consolations, and foretastes of the beatific vision. He takes all sorts of appearances, and enters into all conditions for the good of his church, on purpose to teach the most exalted pastors to regulate their conduct, and to fashion their external behaviour, so as may best answer the occasions of the faithful, and the edification of their neighbour. He makes even the senses serviceable to faith, though they seem quite contrary thereto; and this is what we ought to endeavour at in the instructions which we are obliged to give others. This brightness of glory, wherein Christ appears to these three apostles, confirms the confession which St. Peter made of his divinity, fortifies this apostle against the trouble which the prediction of his sufferings gave him, and encourages all Christians to the practice of the doctrines of self-denial and the cross.

3. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.

The law and the prophets give witness to Christ, and scarcely speak but of him; he who seeks any other thing therein, besides the Son of God and his church, reads them not like a Christian. In the prophetical and figurative parts of the Scripture, we see nothing worthy of God, unless we consider them together with Christ, and behold him represented in those shadows.

4. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

Let us not set our hearts upon outward comforts; the sweetness of them is apt to make men forget the necessity of passing through sufferings in their way to heaven. We are disposed to lay hold of the first object which presents itself, when it flatters our inclination toward ease and pleasure. But we ought still to mistrust it, and give ourselves time to reflect, that we may see whether it agree with the rule of our duties, and with the will and designs of God concerning us. If this small drop of vision put St. Peter into an ecstasy, my God, what effect will that torrent of delights have with which thou wilt fill, and, as it were, inebriate thy elect!

5. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Let us receive, with a particular respect, that which the Father himself declares to us concerning his Son. According to this gospel of the eternal Father, we must believe in Jesus Christ as Son of God, and be persuaded that the Father loves no person, nor is pleased with any thing, but in his Son; and we must attentively hear him as our Master and our law. See here that which God does continually in the hearts of men. To enlighten them, to make them fruitful in good works, to extinguish or allay the heat of concupiscence: these are so many effects of the grace of Christ, denoted by the bright cloud; and which neither the letter of the law, nor the shadows of sacrifices, nor the preaching of the prophets, were able to

produce. Jesus Christ alone does it, by speaking to the heart, of which he only is the Master and Instructor. He alone, therefore, can make it hear effectually, so as to obey, love, follow, and imitate him. Speak, Lord, to my heart; but speak with authority, as the only Son of God, as the personal truth, and the principle of that love which existed from all eternity.

6. And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7. And Jesus came and touched them, and he said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

Great and extraordinary truths fill the mind at first with fear. Jesus Christ dispels it, by touching us with the internal hand of his grace, giving us the love and practice of these truths, and removing every thing but himself from before our eyes. Earth is not the place for large communications from God; man, encumbered with flesh, is incapable either of seeing or understanding the wonders of eternity. Let us be content to adore them by the light of faith, and in the eternal Word, veiled and overshadowed with the cloud of our flesh.

9. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

Thus God frequently casts into the heart truths which, like seeds sown late, produce only backward fruits. We must not neglect to sow the heart of sinners, though it seem as if it were dead, and like ground in the winter season; the spring of grace, and time of resurrection, may possibly come even for such. There is a time to live retired, and a time to appear in the world; a time to make known the greatest truths, and a time to conceal them; a prudent pastor knows how to adapt himself to the capacity of the weak.

10. And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

The wit of man still discovers some contradiction in the mysteries of religion; a tractable disciple humbly desires that instruction which he needs. Those teachers who have not the true knowledge of the Scriptures, nor the Spirit of God

to understand them, are good for nothing but to perplex those whom they should instruct and prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ. To lull sinners asleep, persuading them that the time of death, which to every one is the second coming of Christ, is yet at a great distance, is full as dangerous as it was to believe that the time of his first appearance was not come, as the doctors of the law did, confounding the one with the other.

11. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

It is out of mercy that Christ will have harbingers or forerunners. God does not intend to surprise, but to awaken, sinners. All preachers of repentance are the harbingers of Jesus Christ. It is by means of this, that, like John and Elias, they labour to restore all things, in reclaiming and bringing sinners back to the obedience and piety of the fathers of their faith.

12. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. 13. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

There is no age, no time, in which there does not arise some Elias, some imitator of his zeal, to exclaim and inveigh against the violation of God's law and the profaners of his worship, to preach repentance to sinners, and to publish the truth to the great. Wo to those who know him not, who stop their ears, and who are the occasion of his sufferings! To suffer, is the lot and portion of Jesus Christ and his ministers. It is good to look upon every preacher as our Elias, as the last whom God designs to send to proclaim to us the coming of Christ, and to excite us to prepare his way by repentance.

SECT. II.—THE LUNATIC CURED.—THE POWER OF FAITH—OF PRAYER AND FASTING.

14. ¶ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a *certain* man, kneeling down to him, and saying, 15. Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

The rage and power of the devil against man, in conse-

quence of sin, is expressed by the sad usage which this lunatic suffers. The devil, in bodily possessions as well as spiritual possessions, knows how to take advantage of the constitution, and of natural causes and dispositions, in order to conceal himself. Some of these are as contrary as fire and water. Would to God the sinner were as thoroughly sensible of the misery of his soul, and the spiritual illusions of the devil, as this father is of those under which his son labours! See here the first steps toward conversion; to approach Christ, to humble ourselves in his presence, earnestly to pray to him, and with confidence to lay our misery before him.

16. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

God often permits his ministers to be unsuccessful in the cure of souls, both through a just judgment on the latter, and that he may teach the former to expect all from Christ, and to refer their good success to him; that he may purify their hearts by shame and humiliation, and oblige them to pray more frequently, to know, and to distrust themselves.

17. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

Nothing raises more indignation in Christ than a distrust of his goodness and power in healing our diseases. Alas! how many are there, who present themselves before the ministers of the church, and even at the sacrament, without receiving the cure of their souls, through the bad disposition of their heart, which keeps Christ at a distance, because they come thither without faith, and with an irregular intention! Let us be sure not to imagine that these words of Christ betray any impatience in him, but, on the contrary, let us adore therein his long and unwearied patience toward sinners. Harshness is only in his words, gentleness is in his heart.

18. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

Jesus Christ is the only person whom the devil cannot resist. There are some souls whose cure God reserves to himself alone, and to whom all the application of his ministers

appears to be utterly ineffectual. He sometimes does all without them, to the end that they may know that they never do any thing without him. It is a matter of the greatest importance for us, to place our trust and confidence, not in the minister, but in Jesus Christ, who, by the sole motion of his will, cures in an instant.

19. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

When we find our endeavours, with respect to some souls, ineffectual, we ought to humble ourselves, and to examine before God in prayer what obstacles there may be, on our part, to his grace and mercy toward them. Far be from us the pride of those who never impute to themselves the faults and unfruitfulness of their ministry!

20. And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

There are perhaps but few ministers of Christ to whom, upon their addresses to him in prayer, he might not answer after the same manner—that the weakness of their faith is a hinderance to the conversion and improvement of souls. A faith, which has a perfect confidence without any presumption; a holy boldness and liveliness, not weakened by a mistaken humility, and which can discern when it is proper to desire and expect a miracle, is such a thing as is not at all common. To remove pride out of a sinner's heart is to remove a mountain. This can be the work only of a great faith; and this faith must be, at the same time, both the fruit and the seed of many prayers, and of a penitential life.

21. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

In order to subdue evil habits, we must humble the mind by prayer, and mortify the flesh by fasting. This is the duty of the minister as well as of the penitent. He has no faith at all, if it do not make him have recourse to prayer and mortification, which are the natural effects thereof. Faith causes a man to pray, by making him sensible of his inability as to all goodness, without the assistance of grace; it disposes him

to lead a mortified life, by showing the unworthiness both of the sinner and the minister.

SECT. III.—THE PASSION FORETOLD.—CHRIST PAYS TRIBUTE.

22. ¶ And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: 23. And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

What will become of the man who shall fall into the hands of the living God, if God suffers so much by falling into the hands of mortal men! Men apply themselves very imperfectly to the consideration of the mysteries of salvation, and are affected with them after too natural a manner. They are unduly afflicted at the death of Christ, and rejoice not at his resurrection as they ought; because death is an approaching and natural evil, and the resurrection a mystery of faith. The death of Jesus Christ should humble the sinner, but it should also fill him with confidence and joy. We ought to humble ourselves for being so miserable that nothing but the death of God could save us; and to rejoice that the mercy of God is so great toward us that he refused not to be born and to die for us.

24. ¶ And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute *money* came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

The divinity of Jesus Christ, stooping thus low, confounds the vanity and eagerness of men in defence of their rights. He refuses no kind of dependence and submission, that he may make the sinner like it, who has always so great an aversion thereto.

25. He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? 26. Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

Christ does not insist upon his rights as to external and temporal things, but only in secret and among his apostles. The clergy likewise, after his example, should not speak too frequently to secular persons concerning this kind of pri-

vileges annexed to their state; nor the faithful, concerning Christian and evangelical liberty, which dispenses not with external laws. The Son of God, the Lord of the temple, and the true temple of God, could not be obliged to pay a tribute imposed by God's command for the use and service of the figurative temple. To make our prerogatives known is not always vanity; nor to take proper measures of receding from them without any prejudice to our right.

27. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

It is the duty of charity still to prevent the occasions of scandal or offence. Let us admire and adore the poverty of Christ in not having the value of four drachms; his obedience and humility in paying them, though not due; his charity in avoiding, even by an extraordinary means, that which might have given offence to the weak; and his greatness, under his humiliation, in paying tribute, but paying it as God, by an act of sovereign power. They are far from imitating Christ who disturb the peace, offend the weak, neglect the care of souls, and rise up against the secular powers, to secure some little temporal advantage, and to maintain some external prerogatives. Liberty and subjection agree very well together in a Christian, who by faith is entirely free in respect of all things present, and becomes subject to every creature by charity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SECT. I.—CHRIST TEACHES TO BE HUMBLE, AND TO BECOME A CHILD.

1. At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

How great and common a misfortune is it for men to think of nothing but their own greatness, and how to raise themselves above others! Ambition is no less a vice of ecclesias-

tical than of secular persons. If the apostles, who had forsaken all, and who had so long had the instructions and example of Christ before their eyes, were, notwithstanding, subject thereto, who ought not to be afraid? This passion is sometimes more violent, and always more scandalous and offensive, in the kingdom of humility, than in the world, which is the kingdom of pride.

2. And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

It is a duty of the pastoral charity to adapt ourselves to the capacity of the weak, when we instruct them. Jesus Christ does not here propose himself, but a little child, for a pattern of humility. It is the business of our faith to raise our minds to that divine child, who is free from the defects of the children of Adam, and who has all the perfections of the only Son of God.

3. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

He who still continues under his disorderly habits, and who, instead of abasing and humbling himself, thinks of nothing but becoming greater than he is,—this person certainly is not in the way of salvation. Either Christ is not truth itself, or, without a true conversion and humility, there is not the least hope of any place in heaven. There are but too many who are children in inconstancy, affection to sensible things, and love of toys; but how few are such in innocency, simplicity, ignorance of evil, and docility!

4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

What is it to be an evangelical child but to be pure in mind and body, to wish ill to none, to be ready to do good to all, and to have no projects for advancement, riches, honours, fortune, etc.? This Christian childhood will make us great in the kingdom of heaven. How low do we debase ourselves, in order to be great on earth! To be great in heaven, how little do we do! The humility which pleases God is that of choice or of acceptance, not a natural meanness of heart and

spirit. The first place is promised to that virtue which seems the most easy, and to the exercise of which external things are least needful; for this reason, we are certainly the less to be excused if we want it.

5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

Jesus Christ is received in the persons of the poor, but especially of such as are good and virtuous. In the world, men glory in entertaining the great and the rich: under the gospel, the chief advantage lies in receiving those who stand in need of every thing except the Spirit of Christ. These must be received, not out of human respects, nor ostentation, nor for our own satisfaction, but in the name and for the sake of Christ. This renders our hospitality truly Christian.

SECT. II.—GIVING OFFENCE TO BE AVOIDED.—THE EYE TO BE PLUCKED OUT.

6. But whoso shall offend* one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea. [**Fr.* is an occasion of falling and offence to.]

A violent death is not so much to be dreaded as the being, through bad counsel or example, the cause of the fall of one soul. The salvation of one soul is more precious to God than we are able to express. The more faith separates us from the world, renders us despicable in its sight, and deprives us of its protection, the more God espouses our interests, and declares himself on our side. If, by offending one single soul, we thus draw on ourselves the indignation of God, how abominable in his sight must those needs be who offend a whole city, and by their wanton dresses, lascivious and loose discourses, immodest pictures, wicked examples and the like, occasion the fall and ruin of a vast number of souls!

7. ¶ Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

Offence, or scandal, which destroys the generality of the world, contributes to the good of those who love God, by means

of the good use which charity causes them to make of it. The world is the centre of offence, and as it were the throne whereon it reigns. Unhappy is that man who continues exposed to it without necessity! Unhappy likewise is he who exposes others thereto! But most unhappy of all is that person who becomes an agent for the world, and an instrument of the devil, to seduce and draw others into sin! The general corruption of the world is a certain source of offences, but yet imposes no manner of necessity on any one to give them.

8. Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

Man has within himself occasions enough of sin, and needs not seek for any from without. He must be ready to part with what is dearest to him, and effectually to cut off all evil actions, words, and inclinations. This is a circumcision grievous to nature, but necessary to salvation. A friend who does us all the good offices imaginable, but who, being an enemy to our piety, hinders us from serving God, is a necessary hand, which, notwithstanding, must be cut off. A visit where a man meets with dangerous objects, which is attended with loss of time, occasions of evil-speaking, distraction of mind, and other temptations to sin, is a foot which we are likewise obliged to cut off.

9. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Let us make no scruple of retrenching the curiosity of our senses and understanding, as a thing very dangerous; since, by means of this beneficial blindness, we may attain to that sublime knowledge of God and Christ wherein eternal life does consist. An immodest picture, of what price soever it be,—a lascivious, scurrilous, or licentious book,—a dangerous object,—each of these is an eye, which must be plucked out. A director of the conscience, be his abilities ever so great, yet if, by any criminal or imprudent affection, he become an obstacle to the salvation or perfection of himself, or the person under his care, is an eye which this person must cast away.

10. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Great reason has the Son of God to caution us against despising his little ones, and honest persons of simplicity and innocence; for almost all mankind is guilty of this vice, and scarce any one sensible of it. How can a man despise those who belong to God, and count it a small matter to induce them to sin, and expose them to destruction by bad example or advice? Is not this to oppose God himself, who takes so much care to preserve them, First, By his providence, which watches over them particularly by means of his angels? They who have no respect for these little ones on account of the care which is taken of them by those angels who stand in the presence of God and always behold his face, ought at least to forbear hurting them for fear of such powerful protectors. The doctrine of guardian angels is authorized by Christ. God makes every thing subservient to the guidance, protection, and salvation of men; and they very seldom reflect upon it. In promoting the welfare of souls, let us still have God before our eyes; and let us do all for his sake, and in his presence. This is a disposition which priests, the visible angels of the faithful, ought above all things to imitate in the invisible angels.

11. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

A second reason against offending those who belong to God, is because he has loved them so exceedingly as to give his own Son for them. Who can either doubt or wonder as to God's sending his angels for the service of souls, after he has sent his own Son to serve them even with his blood? They do what they can to destroy the workmanship of Christ, who, by means of scandal or offence, cause those to relapse into sin whom he by his labours and sufferings has rescued and cleansed from it.

SECT. III.—THE STRAYED SHEEP.

12. How think ye? if a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

Let us learn from hence, what charity and pastoral care is

due to those souls which are not in the way of salvation. It is a rule to be observed by pastors, to apply themselves most to those souls whose wants are greatest. It is contrary to the order of the duties incumbent on a true pastor, and to the example of Christ, for a man to be wholly taken up in the spiritual direction of persons far advanced in the way to heaven,—a work which is pleasant and easy; and entirely to neglect such as are gone astray, the bringing back of whom requires abundance of pains, application, and prayer. It is the indispensable duty of one of this profession to leave those who too industriously seek, and without any necessity follow him; and to hasten after such as fly from him, of whom God will certainly demand an account at his hands.

13. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that *sheep*, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

Is it not a sufficient motive to engage a man to apply himself to the conversion of souls, by ministerial cares, prayers, and good works, to know that it occasions so much joy in the church? The more we have grieved the church and afflicted Christ by our corrupt and irregular life, the more earnestly ought we to endeavour to raise in them this kind of joy, by contributing to the conversion of others. In order to comprehend the good Shepherd's joy on this account, it is necessary to comprehend his love toward souls,—but who is able to do this? If we would have some idea of it which comes near the truth, let us judge of it by his descent from heaven to be incarnate, by the labours of his life, and by the pain and ignominy of his death.

14. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

To cause any of the elect to sin is to thwart God's designs concerning them; by our bad example to give the least of our brethren an occasion of offence or falling, is to oppose his providence in the appointment of angels, and his love in the mission of his Son. Let the world and the devil do their utmost to corrupt and destroy those whom God, with the tenderness of a father, loves to eternity; not one of them shall perish! They are little, together with Christ, in this life:

they shall with him be great in heaven. Grant, O my God, that we may all concur with the designs of thy mercy toward these souls, and toward our own; and that we may be of the number of these little ones, whose salvation is secured by thy will and adorable election!

SECT. IV.—BROTHERLY REPROOF.

15. ¶ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

It is not enough for a man not to make his brother fall; if he be fallen of himself, he must raise him up. Can we see a soul ready to perish through a breach of charity toward us, and not be concerned at it? This is to be wanting ourselves in that charity which we owe him. There often needs no more than a step, a word, or a small advance on our part, to open the eyes and heart of such a weak person,—is the refusing so small a thing consistent with imitating Christ? We must neither revenge ourselves on him who has offended us, nor neglect his salvation. This is the first rule to be observed in reproving our brother; in doing which, charity must spare the confusion, and tenderly manage the weakness of the person reproved. Brotherly reproof is certainly a duty; but it is one also to give it after a useful manner, so as not to wound our brother instead of curing him, and so as to avoid every thing which may render our admonition fruitless, or perhaps hurtful, which it must necessarily be, if delivered in a harsh, haughty, indiscreet, or public way.

16. But if he will not hear *thee, then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

The second step to be taken in brotherly reproof is to use prudence, in order to excite the sinner's shame and fear, and thereby to awake him from his drowsiness. It is not enough for us to do something toward the salvation of our brother; we must use all proper methods to procure it. It is charity and prudence to take care to prevent his denying his fault, and, at the same time, not to make it public ourselves.

17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but

if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

The third rule of reproof is, zealously to have recourse to authority, in order to discover the sin, without intending to defame the sinner. The fourth and last rule, which charity, prudence, and zeal oblige us to observe in reproving our brethren, is to exclude the incorrigible person from all society to prevent the infection of others, and to hasten his amendment. Excommunication is the last remedy, but such as is extraordinary, and reserved for the incorrigible in the case of enormous sins. The church alone has authority to exercise it by the chief pastors, with the presumed consent at least of the whole body. They who, having deserved excommunication, despise it, know not what it is to be in God's sight no other than a heathen, and to have neither him for a Father, nor Christ for a Saviour, nor the church for a mother, nor Christians for brethren.

SECT. V.—THE POWER OF THE KEYS.

18. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

How much is the judgment of the church on an obstinate sinner to be dreaded, since it is ratified in heaven! God binds and looses all those who are bound and loosed on earth, because no person is truly bound or loosed who is not so justly. A man may be excommunicated externally, and to the eyes of men, without being really so either on earth or in heaven. Let us be more afraid of one single sin than of all the excommunications in the world; since these can be only the punishment or remedy of sin, and without it are nothing at all.

19. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

God is found in union and agreement. Nothing is more efficacious in prayer. When we are united to Jesus Christ, and offer up our prayers through his mediation, it is he himself who prays, his merits which ask, his love which entreats,

his heart which groans, his blood which intercedes; and it is the Son who obtains all from his Father. This shows the advantages of prayer made in common; of Christian societies, where God is served, as it were, with one heart and one soul; but above all, of the great society of the church, where we are united in the body and by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

20. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Where charity is, there is Christ; where division is, there is the evil spirit. A Christian family which, in choosing the state of marriage, has sought God alone, which brings up children only for him, and which does all the good that lies within its sphere, may be assured, by virtue of this promise, that Christ is present in the midst of it in a very particular manner. How great respect is due to councils, wherein the whole church is assembled by its pastors, for the illustration of the truth, the reformation of manners, the establishment of discipline, and the interpretation of the Scriptures!

SECT. VI.—FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.—THE DEBT OF TEN THOUSAND TALENTS.

21. ¶ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

It is a very dangerous thing for a man to be unwilling to do any more good than just what he thinks precisely necessary to salvation. Self-love is always on its guard, always afraid of going too far, and of giving too much. Nothing is more difficult than the forgiveness of injuries to corrupt nature, which is still seeking pretences to evade this duty more than any other. Men seldom consult casuists, but when it is to justify, if possible, their natural and corrupt inclinations.

22. Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Charity is an immense and eternal debt; and, by consequence, the love of enemies and the forgiveness of injuries must have no bounds in the heart, though they admit of some in the external behaviour. God and Christ have loved us without measure, and that even while we were enemies, and

have freely pardoned all our sins; and yet we deliberate nicely how far our love of enemies and our forgiveness of injuries are to extend!

23. ¶ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

If we consider the lives of the generality of men, can we believe that they are persuaded they must give an account of all their actions at death and judgment? It is with respect to this duty of forgiving injuries, chiefly, that a pastor ought to set before his people's eyes the judgment of God; because, on their performance of it, he has engaged to remit every thing, and, on their refusal, he refuses to show any mercy.

24. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

How many debts have we contracted toward God, if we consider that all our time, all our thoughts, desires, words, and actions are his due! We may find on earth ten thousand talents; but where can we find a sum sufficient to satisfy God's justice for one single sin, unless he himself give us wherewith to pay it! Let us all look upon ourselves in the person of this miserable debtor; and yet in him we can see nothing but only a shadow of our own misery.

25. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

There is no sinner but is utterly insolvent, in respect of the divine justice, if he be judged without mercy. God cannot sell the sinner, nor alienate the right which he has over him; but the sinner sells himself to sin and to the devil for a moment's satisfaction. It is the very height of misery for God to leave the sinner in the hands of him to whom he has sold himself; and this, to be under him not as a proprietor, but executioner. A damned soul, who has no longer any share in Christ, has not wherewith to pay his debts; and for this reason his punishment will have no end.

26. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

A sinner, who sees his own poverty, has no other remedy

left but these four dispositions: (1.) A sincere humiliation of heart. (2.) A fervent prayer. (3.) An application full of hope to the patience of God. (4.) A real desire and firm resolution of satisfying God to the utmost of his power by repentance. It is no presumption in a man who has nothing to promise the payment of all, provided he depend, not on himself, but on the patience of God and the merits of Jesus Christ. The value of these is infinite; and from hence the repentance of a Christian receives all its worth. A man cannot have too great hopes, when he is resolved not to spare himself, and his heart is entirely devoted to God.

27. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

God, rich in mercy, shows it more abundantly than we ask it, when we ask it as we ought. He cannot, as one may say, withstand humility: this disarms his justice, and opens the treasures of his mercy. God never grants any thing short of a full pardon; he forgives the greatest debts as easily as the least, but still on this condition, that a man do not repent only in part, and that his resolution of performing this duty be full and complete.

28. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

Hard-heartedness toward our neighbour, and ingratitude toward God, are the fruits of a false conversion; whereas a true one produces always a compassionate charity for our brethren, and a love full of acknowledgment toward God. Forgetfulness in respect of his favours is very often the cause of our relapses. Let us consider the hard-heartedness and ingratitude of this wicked servant in all its circumstances, and we shall find ourselves therein represented to the life.

29. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

Man, though uncertain of his success, humbles himself before men on the account of temporal debts; and yet, on the account of such as are eternal, he humbles not himself before God, though certain that his humiliation will succeed. Let

us thoroughly apprehend that we are poor and criminal in the sight of God, and we shall then, as in a glass, behold ourselves in such of our brethren as are so in respect of us. Let us think on that moment, wherein we shall fall down at the feet of our Judge, there to receive the sentence of our eternal fate; and we shall have but little inclination to insult those whom we see prostrate before us.

30. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

God hears the sinner, and yet the sinner will not hear one like himself. When a man is thoroughly sensible of the weight of his own sins, he is very far from judging others with rigour. God's ears eternally shut against the sinner, hell for his prison, and an inflexible justice punishing every thing and remitting nothing,—this is what he must expect who treats his brother after this manner. Truth itself has established this retaliation, declaring, that "with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again." This then is an immutable law, and such as the sinner can never change, but by changing himself.

31. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

When in heaven we are once united to the supreme and sovereign Justice, we cannot but espouse its interests against sin and the obdurate sinner. Not to pardon injuries is to scandalize and provoke both heaven and earth. He who hurts one member of Christ, gives offence to all the rest. The whole church will one day rise up against the revengeful, and behold with joy the judgments of God on all such as have shown themselves without mercy and compassion.

32. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: 33. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

The goodness and indulgence of God toward us is a pattern which we ought to follow in respect of others, and a law which obliges us thereto. God forgives all, and that at the entreaty of the criminal himself; but to induce a revengeful person to forgive, what pains, what endeavours must be used! Can

rigour in exacting temporal debts, and in treating without mercy such as are unable to satisfy them—can this be allowed to a Christian, who ought to imitate his God and Father,—to a debtor, who has been forgiven only on the condition of forgiving others,—to a servant, who should obey his master,—and to a criminal, who is in expectation of his judge and final sentence?

34. And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

There is no mercy for him who will not show any. Nothing raises the divine anger and vengeance more than the spirit of revenge in men; because by this we neglect the condition of our reconciliation with God, violate the sacred covenant of Christian prayer, and invade the rights of the supreme Justice. No refuge, no remedy is to be found, when once a man is delivered to the tormentors, of whom these are but a faint resemblance. Death puts an end to every thing on earth; but nothing has an end, in that place, where a man can never see any end of his debt, and where death itself is immortal.

35. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

We must forgive, not only with our lips, but from the bottom of our hearts; and this is not barely a counsel, but a commandment. We may deceive men by a feigned reconciliation, and a pretended mercy; but how can we hide our hearts from him who is their Creator and Judge? The term *every one*, which is here used, shows that no person whatever is exempt from this obligation of forgiving; neither emperors nor kings, neither great nor small, neither rich nor poor. Give us, Lord, this Christian heart, whose bottom is all charity and mercy, and whose works are all mildness and indulgence!

CHAPTER XIX.

SECT. I.—MARRIAGE INDISSOLUBLE.

1. And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan;

Jesus goes about everywhere to seek the sinner. A good pastor's thirst after the salvation of souls is never satisfied in this life. He always finds sufficient exercise for his zeal. The end of one instruction in a pastor, of one mission in an evangelical labourer, and of one visitation in a bishop, is but the beginning of another.

2. And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.

Men never follow Christ in vain. Here they run after him in hopes of some temporal advantages; how much more should the pleasant odour of his virtues, the holiness of his mysteries, the sweetness of his truth, the hope of his grace, and the expectation of eternal happiness, draw us after him! How free and ready is he to distribute his favours! Here are no delays, excuses, or denials,—he heals immediately; but what pains must one take to draw from the hands of man a small alms, a kindness, or even a debt itself!

3. ¶ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

They who have once declared against the truth are seldom reconciled, but seek all occasions to betray it. Hypocrisy is generally of the party; a pretended love of truth serves often as a veil to cover the hatred which they bear it, and the persecution which they raise against it.

4. And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female,

In this answer, Jesus Christ shows that marriage is indissoluble, First, By divine institution, and the order settled at the creation. To answer a case of conscience well, in the spirit, and after the example of Christ, we must not regard

that which the corruption of manners, or the remissness of men, has introduced; but we must look back to the original will, design, and institution of God. Christ knows not what it is to accommodate his morality to the times or to the inclinations of men. What was done at the beginning, is that which God has judged most worthy of his glory, most profitable for man, and most agreeable to nature.

5. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

The second reason which Christ gives for the indissolubility of marriage, is the express commandment of God, comformable to the institution of nature. The union which is formed between man and woman by marriage is more intimate and inseparable than that between parents and children. It is honoured by being made the figure and representation of the union which is between Christ and his church. It is a partnership of soul and body, of life and fortune, of comfort and support, and of designs and inclinations. What a wickedness then is it, to sow division in a society so holy and so dear to God! But how much greater is it still, to violate it by a criminal and adulterous commerce with another woman!

6. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

The third reason of the indissolubility of marriage, is because the married couple become thereby, as it were, one and the same person, and one sole principle of their children's birth. This is not the invention of men, but the work of God. As it was he who made this union at the beginning, so it is he who continues it down through all ages,—a union, worthy of respect, honour, gratitude, and singular circumspection; but much the less respected, honoured, and understood, by reason of the brutality and lust of men.

7. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

How great is the disingenuity or ignorance of these doctors, who seek for pretences whereby to favour concupiscence, even from the divine law itself? It is dangerous sometimes to tolerate the least evil, though prudence may require it;

because toleration raises itself insensibly to permission, and permission soon sets up for command. A bill or writing of divorcement is appointed, on purpose to render the practice of it more difficult; and men make use of this to justify the action, and to give it the authority of a law.

8. He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

The fourth reason of the indissolubility of marriage, and which Christ gives as a proof of it, is the example of the first married couple. Whatever the laws do not forbid, is not therefore according to the mind and first intention of God. That which is established by the wisdom of the Creator, is one thing,; that which is extorted from his condescension by the hardness of men's hearts, is another. The former has nothing but what is worthy of the perfection of the Creator; the latter is only a remedy for the imperfection of the creature.

9. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

The fifth reason of this indissolubility, is the evil consequent on separation. Christ takes the authority of a legislator, that he may reform, without any human respects whatever, the abuses introduced and tolerated contrary to the appointment of God. He here decides the case proposed to him, and declares, that it is not lawful for married persons to separate, except in the case of adultery; and that a woman, put away even on this account, cannot, during her first husband's life, be married to another. Nothing hinders Christ from declaring for the truth, though the design of his enemies in asking him questions be only to ensnare and bring him into trouble.

SECT. II.—VOLUNTARY EUNUCHS.—LITTLE CHILDREN.

10. ¶ His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry.

Before we enter into an engagement, which nothing but death can entirely dissolve, we are obliged in prudence to consider it on all sides, in order to understand it thoroughly.

There are inconveniences in every state; and those of marriage are not sufficient to keep such persons from it as God thinks fit to call thereto. They must consult his will, and rely upon his grace.

11. But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given.

This is a very wise answer, which blames neither of these two states, but approves them both. To some, marriage is necessary by reason of their frailty. When God gives the grace, celibacy is to be preferred. He who, out of caprice, humour, or licentiousness, and not at the divine call, leads a single life, is more in danger than he imagines. Continency is a peculiar gift of God; he who has received it cannot preserve it but by humility, vigilance, prayer, fasting, and mortification.

12. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*.

Grace makes one embrace with joy that which otherwise is not endured without pain, when nature or the violence of men imposes it. The state of voluntary and perpetual continence, undertaken for God's sake, is a gift of God himself, and the only kind of virginity which he has engaged to reward.

13. ¶ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

Since the generality of fathers take more thought how to make their children rich and powerful, than to put them under the protection of Christ, and to draw down his blessing upon them by the prayers of good people, one need not wonder that their youth is so addicted to all manner of vice. Imposition of hands, used frequently by Christ, by him has passed from the Jewish church to the Christian. It is, as it were, the visible sign and sacrament of prayer, in which the divine power and assistance are invoked. It is not according to the spirit and conduct of Christ, to treat those with severity who are as yet children in the spiritual life.

14. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus Christ loves children, because he loves simplicity and innocence. Heaven is for the humble and simple, of whom children are the representation. Christ tacitly upbraids his disciples with having so soon forgot his instructions concerning the advantages of childhood. He took this age upon himself, and sanctified it, as well as the other ages, that he might be the pattern and Saviour of men in all. He lets slip no opportunity of recommending and inspiring humility, as being the very gate of heaven.

15. And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence.

Could the imposition of Christ's hands be otherwise than powerful in preventing wickedness in these children? Lay on me, O Lord, the invisible hand of thy divinity, that it may take possession of my heart and senses, that it may repress in me whatever is contrary to thy will, and consecrate me to God as a victim in thee and by thee.

SECT. III.—THE RICH YOUNG MAN.—PERFECTION.

16. ¶ And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

It is to Jesus Christ that we must address ourselves, in order to learn the way of salvation. The conduct of this young man is wise, pious, and prudent; and fit to be imitated by all of his age, who think of choosing a state and condition of life. They are—(1.) To look upon God as their Father and Master, without whom they ought not to choose at all. (2.) To have confidence in him as a good Father, who hears and directs all such as sincerely apply to him, without seeking any thing but his will. (3.) To approach him with a firm belief of his wisdom, power, and goodness; and a full persuasion that no man has any light, strength, or piety but what flows from, and is freely imparted by, him who alone is wise, powerful, and good in his own nature. (4.) To have no other design or ambition than to put themselves into a condition of working out their salvation. (5.) To believe that eternal life is not bestowed for nothing.

17. And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is,* God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

They must (6) look upon God as the fulness, source, pattern, and end of all good. No one can be good but by adoring this fulness, by receiving from this source, by imitating this pattern, and acting for this end. (7.) They are to consider, that the fulfilling God's commandments is the general way of salvation, and the ordinary and indispensable vocation; and that to choose any state or condition of life in which we cannot fulfil them, is to choose not to be saved. To enter into or to continue in such a state, is the same thing.

18. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness. 19. Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Those who are of age to choose a condition for themselves, ought (8) to take care betimes to avoid pharisaical ostentation, which is more intent on the observation of ceremonial laws and external usages, than of the essential duties of religion, justice, and charity, which are part of the eternal law, indispensable, and necessary for all conditions. They must (9) remember that, in order to salvation, it is not sufficient for a man to honour his parents, and to make no attempt on the life, wife, goods, or reputation of his neighbour; but that he is obliged likewise to do good to others, according to their needs and his own power, and according to the rules of charity, of which the well-regulated love of ourselves is the perfect model.

20. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

It is good (10) for them not to rely too much on their having passed the time of their childhood innocently enough, and without any open violation of the divine law. For this perhaps has proceeded solely from their want of opportunities, and their having been kept from ill company by the vigilance of parents and masters; and even these blessings are in great danger of being lost through the vanity and presumption of young men, and the liberty which they claim of disposing of

themselves. They must (11) be persuaded that they have scarce done any thing as yet, and that the main business is still unfinished. For, to serve God in the spirit of Christ and his religion, with a perfect disengagement from all other things, and to choose a proper condition of life for the residue of it,—this is what remains to be done by a young man who has not yet thoroughly understood his duty, nor been master of himself.

21. Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.

They ought (12) to observe that, besides the general call and the common way of the commandments, every one has his particular way and call, which he must learn from God with the assistance of men. They ought (13) to be persuaded, that it is necessary to be so far disengaged from every thing, in the disposition of the heart, as to prefer nothing before God, his love, and his will; and that this is an obligation common to all Christians, and included in the general call. Actually to quit every thing, in order to follow Jesus Christ in a state of poverty, is only a matter of counsel in general, but which may become a necessary means of salvation to those whom God is pleased to call thereto. Whatever we deposit in the hands of the poor, [from a desire to glorify God,] we shall receive with infinite advantage in heaven. He who has stripped himself of all his earthly possessions, is in a readiness to follow Christ, but is not yet arrived at perfection.

22. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Lastly, Those who are about to choose a state of life, must be convinced, that neither great riches, nor worldly hopes and expectations, ought to hinder them from following the voice of God when he calls them to perfection. We undergo a great deal while we are in suspense between the love of the world and the love of our salvation; we have no manner of peace, good or bad, till the one or the other becomes victorious and predominant. We often deceive ourselves in believing that we are fond of nothing; a proper conjuncture or

occasion is wanting to make us thoroughly know ourselves. We possess, with fondness and sensual affection, whatever we cannot leave without regret and sorrow. Let every one examine himself by this rule.

SECT. IV—THE RICH HARDLY SAVED.

23. ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Christ abates nothing of the strictness and holiness of his maxims, on the account of the trouble which they cause to worldly persons; but, on the contrary, delivers them in the stronger terms. Earthly riches are a great obstacle to salvation, because it is very rare to possess without loving them. To be rich, therefore, is a great misfortune; but what rich man can we convince of this, if God himself by an extraordinary grace do not open his heart to receive this truth? Truth itself affirms it with an oath, and yet scarce any one hears or believes it.

24. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Astonishing expression! which shows us, that a rich man cannot be saved with an ordinary grace. A man is not rich, in the sense here intended, unless he loves riches; and he is properly enough poor in the midst of his treasures, when he uses them, not as a proprietor, but as the steward of God. Wealth is the gate of hell to the greatest number; and to some few the key of heaven. If he who only possesses his own proper estate, can so hardly be saved, what will become of those who unjustly take away or detain that of another?

25. When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

The natural love which men have for wealth, makes it seem very strange, even to the poor, that it should be so great an obstacle to salvation; how much stranger must it seem to the rich! One cannot easily conceive, how that which contributes so much to the happiness of this life, should be one of the greatest impediments to the felicity of the other; and

yet this is the very reason why it is so; for it is impossible for us to be happy both here and hereafter.

26. But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

The inability of nature to attain to salvation, is not the despair of a Christian, but the triumph of the grace of Christ. Happy inability this, which obliges us to expect all from Him without whom we can do nothing! It is as impossible to God as it is to men, to save a rich man possessed with the love of riches; but God can root up this love out of his heart,—a thing which man is not able to do. Nothing can support and comfort a sinner, who is sensible of his natural weakness and impotency, but to know that God has an absolute power over his heart. How is it possible that a truth so full of consolation should startle Christians? What has liberty to apprehend from the sovereign and almighty hand which made it?

SECT. V.—REWARD AN HUNDREDFOLD.

27. ¶ Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

How can a man but reflect with joy on the advantage of seeing himself in the most direct way to salvation, when he considers the perils to which almost all conditions in the world are continually exposed? To forsake all without following Christ, is the virtue of a philosopher. To follow Christ without forsaking all, is the state of the generality of Christians. But to forsake all and follow Christ is the apostolical perfection, which gives a man a right to hope for the highest reward in the world to come. That man forsakes a great deal who reserves nothing to himself, and renounces all hopes and expectations here below.

28. And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Oh the goodness of Jesus Christ! Instead of checking the too forward confidence of these beginners, he comforts and fortifies them by his mildness, and encourages them by the

prospect of reward. To what do the great aspire by all their wealth and power, but to make themselves masters of the world for a moment? By poverty, humility, and following Christ, men may come to reign with him forever in heaven. There is no true greatness but that which he imparts to those who are united to him, and whom he makes partakers of his power and authority as sovereign Judge of the world.

29. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

How little faith have we, to be unwilling to forsake for a moment that which shall be restored with so much interest in heaven! He who possesses God, regains every thing in him,—this is an hundredfold, which surpasses all expectation. Rather than violate the fidelity due to God, we must break through all ties whatever; there is nothing in the world which we are allowed to prefer before him. Men have not always occasion to forsake all these things for the sake of God, or in order to enter into the way of perfection; but they have always occasion to forsake themselves, by renouncing their inclinations, that they may bear the infirmities and defects of their brethren, their sisters, etc. Here is a double hundredfold—grace in this life, and glory in the other.

30. But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first.

This terrible vicissitude, relating to the Jews and the Gentiles, is a representation of many others in the business of salvation. Perseverance alone is crowned; in a Christian the end is more regarded than the beginning. Many great sinners will raise themselves by repentance above many just persons. There is not any one in the world to whom a man can justly prefer himself. One who seems to be at a greater distance from God, is he for whom he designs an extraordinary grace, and a glory proportionable thereto. Another is [apparently] a great saint at present, who will soon decline, or totally fall. In whatever state we are, we have always sufficient cause to humble ourselves.

CHAPTER XX.

SECT. I.—THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

1. For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. 2. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

God, as it were, went out of himself, early in the creation, and afterward in the incarnation, to call men to serve him in his church. The church is a heavenly kingdom, because God is therein known, worshipped, feared, and loved. It is a vineyard, because it is a place of labour wherein no man should be idle. Every soul is the kingdom and vineyard of the Lord; every one of us is hired, or rather created, to work in this vineyard toward his own salvation, by causing the will of God to reign and flourish therein. Life is but a day, whereof childhood, or the first use of reason, is the first hour. We are called to work from the time of our receiving life and reason. This is the first call.

3. And he went about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. 4. And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

The second call is in the time of youth, which is most commonly idle. Before God calls us by his grace, what can we do toward our salvation? The will which is not prevented thereby, has no light but to go astray with, no warmth of desire but to endanger, and no strength but to hurt itself; it is capable of all evil, incapable of all good. The will is always fickle and inconstant, when not guided and acted by the immutable and eternal will. The more earnestly it endeavours to work, the more faults and sins it commits. The prospect of reward is a good motive, since Jesus Christ himself lays it before our eyes. God is just, and the perfection of reason; this is sufficient ground to expect all from him.

5. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

The third call is at the age of manhood. The fourth in old age, which is almost incapable of work. During this present life, God never ceases calling us to labour and salvation. When he commands us to go, and gives us that which he commands, we immediately set forward, and labour to advantage. If thou wilt, Lord, it is sufficient; for my will without delay will be obedient to thine. Rouse up my dull and slothful heart, and I shall run with vigour in the ways of thy commandments.

6. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

The fifth call is at the end of our lives, and in our decrepit age. We are at no time excused from the work of our salvation; and the mercy of God can render our endeavours useful at any time. No age should be idle; it is always time to begin a work, without which there is not the least hope of eternal happiness. Good God! how full is the world of this sort of people, who pass their whole life in idleness, and are ready to leave it, before they so much as know for what purpose they received it! Man is obliged to pains and labour by the law of the creation; the sinner is condemned to it by way of penance; the Christian is devoted thereto by the holiness of his adoption. Whoever neglects to follow this impression of his Creator, to submit to this decree of his Judge, and to imitate the example of his Head, Pattern, and Restorer, is very much wanting to his own salvation. Every thing conspires to engage man in a busy and laborious course of life; and idleness is one source of damnation.

7. They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, *that* shall ye receive.

If Christ himself come not to seek us, if he do not send us, and set us to work, we shall either live altogether in idleness, or perform only works of darkness, or do every thing out of vanity,—but nothing for the sake of God, or for eternity. No salvation is to be had but by Jesus Christ. Without him man is left to himself, that is, to his own impotency and darkness.

8. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

In the work of salvation there is no rest. We must work all day, even till night; that is to say, all the time of our life, even until death. Every thing is labour in the sight of God: action, suffering, sickness, and even repose itself, when necessity and his appointment require it. Happy evening! which will be the beginning of a glorious eternity to those who shall have laboured diligently, without expecting any other reward than that which God has promised to confer by Jesus Christ, with whom he has intrusted the affairs of his kingdom. This is the comfort of the most weak and imperfect, who are faithful to God according to the measure of their grace, and the quality of their calling, to know that none shall go unrewarded. He who went last to work, being in the last rank of the faithful, shall be rewarded as much as the first, if it appear that he has loved as much.

9. And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

The ways of God are very different from those of men; let us, adoring them, labour and hope. Provided a man be really converted, though at the last hour, he has reason to hope for a reward. But to delay the business of his salvation till the last hour, is to hazard all. When a man sincerely and heartily employs all that remains of his life for God, according to the rules of the gospel, in the spirit and exercises of repentance, he performs every thing which God requires of those whom he calls last, to make them equal to the first. To enjoy God, and to enjoy him eternally, is the penny given equally to all. A moment is perhaps sufficient to obtain it; but it is the height of folly and madness, either through a rash presumption to stay till the last moment, or through a distrust of God's mercy to let that moment slip.

10. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. 11. And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

There are perhaps abundance of persons whose long labours,

great austerities, and aversion to external vices, serve only to nourish their pride, to give them a contempt of others, and to make them think that God is in their debt. The goodness of God toward converted sinners is so great, that it gives some kind of jealousy to the righteous, when left to themselves; and would do so even to the saints, if they were capable of it.

12. Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

We must rely more on the goodness and mercy of God, than on our own labour or righteousness. He dispenses not his liberality either according to the order of our call, or the time of our labour, or the difficulty of the work, or the reputation it has acquired us; but according to the measure of charity, humility, and fidelity which he has placed in the heart for the accomplishing his eternal purposes concerning souls. The less value we set upon that which we do for God, the greater will its value be in his account. We should employ our minds less on what we do and suffer for his sake, than on what he does in us by his grace to enable us; since we have nothing but what we have received, and are still of ourselves but unprofitable servants.

13. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? 14. Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

God dispenses his glory with faithfulness, justice, and bounty: faithfulness to his promises, justice to Christ, and bounty to sinners. There is no other title to glory but God's promise; because even the virtues of a good life are included in this promise, and are his gifts; and because this promise and these gifts have no other rule or foundation than the free love and good-will of God. A person truly humble is always satisfied with his lot and portion, and never envies that of others; because he knows that he deserves nothing, and believes that others are more faithful in paying God the interest of his grace.

15. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

Jesus Christ distributes his gifts as he thinks fit. Every

one ought to be content with the share allowed him. The will and designs of God have always a sovereign justice and infinite wisdom in them, which are infinitely above the reach of human reason. They are hid from man in this life, to teach him not to dispute with God, and to seek him, not by reason, but by faith; and to convince him, that it is not knowledge, but obedience, which sanctifies and saves us. The more spiritual jealousy and envy are, the more criminal are they, and like to those of the devil. The gifts of grace being less due to a sinner than those of nature or fortune, it is a greater sin to think we deserve them, and to make them the object of our ambition or jealousy. To covet the grace bestowed on another, is to be guilty of injustice not only toward him, but also toward God, who is master of his own gifts. There is a desire of grace which is humble and commendable; but there is likewise one which is proud and irregular, and more common than we imagine.

16. So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Let us neither presume nor despair on any account. The Gentiles preferred before the Jews, teach us to leave to God the right of choosing and determining to whom to show mercy. It is not the call, such as it appears to human eyes, but perseverance, which discovers the elect. It belongs to him who bestows it on whom he pleases, to judge who are his in a greater or less degree. The only thing we have to do is, still to humble ourselves, whatever our condition be; because nothing but humility can either keep the first in grace from becoming the last, or draw down that mercy on the last which will make them first.

SECT. II.—THE PASSION FORETOLD.—ZEBEDEE'S CHILDREN.

17. ¶ And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, 18. Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death. 19. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify *him:* and the third day he shall rise again.

All bear their cross in this world; but Christ discovers the

mystery, virtue, and fruit of it to none but his true disciples. He was always mindful of his sufferings and death, not through any anxious foresight of them, or to desire to avoid them, but through a holy earnestness to honour his Father by his sacrifice, and that he might prepare his disciples for it. Such a tranquillity, upon such a prospect, is peculiar to him alone who is God as well as man. He seems to relate a history rather than a prediction. By this, as well as by the assurance which he gives them of his resurrection, he prevents the scandal of the cross.

20. ¶ Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him.

The children of Adam willingly stoop and humble themselves when their interest is concerned, and their humiliation may be a step to their advancement. The ambition which parents have to raise their children, makes them often forget the humiliations and sufferings of Christ, and the obligation of conforming themselves thereto. Who could have imagined, that, while Christ is speaking of nothing but suffering and crucifixion, a mother, who had constantly followed him, should ask any other favour for her children than to partake of his sufferings and cross? She fixes her mind on the resurrection, and on the kingdom which was to follow it, and forgets all the rest. In this she has but too many imitators.

21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

The generality of men seek only to establish themselves, even at the expense of others. There are few mothers whose heads are not filled with the fortune of their children, and who do not, to promote it, make even piety and devotion subservient, if they pretend to have any. Ambition in pursuit of benefices and ecclesiastical dignities seem to be the most commendable, because it is the most easily covered with the pretences of God's glory, the service of the church, and the salvation of children; yet it is certainly the most criminal, dangerous, and fatal of all others.

22. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye

able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

It can be nothing but a false love and a blind passion, which make people desire ecclesiastical employments and great benefices for their children,—since the chief prospect they afford is that of labour and suffering. We know not what we ask, when we take upon ourselves to answer for their call to the most holy state, for the salvation of souls, and for the patrimony of the poor. To what does this false and blind love of ambitious parents tend, but only to put their children in a way of being inevitably ruined, and to oblige themselves to be accountable for their sins and damnation, and for that of many others? No glory is to be hoped, before we have drank of the cup; no crown to be expected, until we have fought the combat. We very often know, neither what to ask, nor how to ask it. Let us be solicitous only in acquiring the Christian virtues; the care of rewarding them let us leave to God. Prayer, made not as it ought, serves only to beget presumption, even in persons of piety.

23. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father.

Jesus Christ gives his disciples assurance of humiliation and the cross, but not of rest and glory; the latter is the fruit and reward of the former. Let us follow him in his sufferings; this is the only way to be assured of the happiness of our eternal portion. This is in the hands of him who gives grace as well as glory, and equally prepares both the one and the other.

24. And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

Ambition is one cause of jealousy, murmuring, and animosity in communities. There is but little of that pure zeal in the world, which is displeased with the sins of others, merely out of hatred to sin, and love to God. Men generally condemn the passions of others, through passions which are of a contrary or like nature. We should learn to know

our own defects by seeing those of other men, without provoking or exasperating them. The condemning these defects in our neighbour renders us the more inexcusable.

25. But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

The power of the church is very different from that of temporal princes, being entirely founded on humility, dedicated to charity, and established on the death and humiliations of Christ, and being designed only to promote the knowledge and love of humility, and to oppose the pride and pomp of the world. Several duties of pastors are here laid down. The first is, not to look on themselves as absolute masters and lords over the flock of Christ. The second, not to do any thing out of a spirit of imperiousness; and to require only a reasonable obedience. The third, to reform and amend the weak after Christ's example, more by instruction than reproof; not driving them away by harsh and severe treatment, but attracting them by mildness and gentle usage. In the kingdom of charity, those who have authority must distinguish themselves by charity, and not by a haughty and imperious conduct.

26. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

The fourth duty of a pastor is, to have nothing of the air and deportment of secular princes. The fifth, to look upon his office as no other than a service or ministry, in which his true greatness does consist. Worldly greatness inclines men still to raise themselves above others, and to make them even instrumental to their own advancement: this is directly contrary to the evangelical and apostolical greatness, which makes men always intent on rendering themselves useful to others by a prudent and wise humility.

27. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

It is the sixth duty of a pastor to attend continually on his flock as a servant; and to dedicate to it all his pains, his goods, his time, and his talents. Happy indeed were the church, if none entered into its offices and preferments, but

by the gate of humility! But all the holy ambition of this virtue consists in seeking only the lowest rank and place of a servant.

28. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

The seventh duty of a good pastor is, to look on Christ as his pattern; to study his conduct and his spirit; and to imitate his poverty, humility, application, and zeal in ministering to souls. To be always ready to give one's life a ransom for the least and meanest of the sheep, and to spend and be spent for them,—in this consists the noble and holy service of which Jesus Christ has set us an example. Can a man possibly act more contrary to this, than by eagerly seeking ecclesiastical dignities, that he may be better attended or ministered unto, that he may be freed from dependence and subjection, and that he may live more at his ease, in plenty, luxury, and repose?

SECT. III.—THE TWO BLIND MEN OF JERICHO.

29. And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. 30. ¶ And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David.

Blindness of heart is the only blindness of which men very seldom complain, and from which they scarcely ever beg to be delivered. It is one part of this blindness not to perceive it, and to think that our sight is good. We are extremely sensible of being deprived of the sight of the creatures, because our love for them is very ardent; if therefore we have no desire to see God, and do nothing to this end, it is certain that we do not love him at all. What have we to do under this spiritual blindness, but, with all the strength of our faith, to cry to him who is our light and our salvation, to implore his mercy, and to put our whole confidence in him?

31. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David.

Whenever we design to draw near to God, we always meet with obstacles from the world; but nothing should hinder us from seeking light, and calling upon Jesus Christ. The devil

knows very well, that when once we have a relish for prayer, and apply ourselves constantly to this duty, we have grounds for the greatest hopes; he therefore diverts us from it as much as possible. Temptations and difficulties at the beginning of conversion, serve only to increase the faith of the elect, to make them pray with more earnestness and fervour, and to rest entirely upon the mercy of God.

32. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?

Jesus Christ comforts, encourages, brings near, and unites to himself all such as persevere in prayer. He would have us humbly declare our wants; and excites our desires, to prepare us to receive his gifts. The poverty and blindness of sinners are the usual objects of God's mercy. He as it were stands still, and attends, while they represent them to him by an humble and fervent prayer. God consults not the will of those on whom he designs to show some peculiar mercy, until he has himself disposed it to a concurrence. He expects our consent, but he first forms it in us. O Jesus, thou knowest what I desire that thou wouldst do unto me!

33. They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

The first grace is to have the eyes of our heart opened, that we may know our own misery and our Deliverer. Who is there has not occasion to beg this grace almost in every action, since there is ever some degree of darkness in our mind and heart? None but the blind pray for bodily sight; but a man must be already enlightened to pray for that of the soul, to hate its blindness, and to solicit its cure. Lord, make me know my own blindness and darkness! Open thou the eyes of my mind, that I may perceive my want of sight, and desire earnestly to recover it!

34. So Jesus had compassion *on them*, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

Jesus Christ gives those only the grace to follow him to whom he has before given the desire and the grace to know him. God's compassion in respect of sin is his love for the sinner; this love is the fountain of grace; this grace is an

operation of his almighty hand; and the effect of this operation is, that the sinner sees and performs his duty, knows God and loves him, that he has faith and does the works of it, that he fixes his eyes on the life and precepts of Christ, and follows him by imitating and obeying him. O my God, may I be the object of thy compassion and love! Let thy grace work in me all that which it causes me to know! And grant that I may follow thee with that gratitude and fidelity which the wonderful kindness thou hast showed, in giving me the light of faith, requires at my hands!

CHAPTER XXI.

SECT. I.—CHRIST'S ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

1. And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

The entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem is a figure of his reign in the church and in the soul. It is by his death that he is to reign; by humiliation that he is to conquer; and by the cross that he is to triumph over sin, the world, and the devil. He enters therefore with some kind of pomp, only in order to meet death; his whole equipage has nothing in it but what tends to humble him; and his triumph serves only to incense his enemies, and to pave his way to the cross.

2. Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose *them*, and bring *them* unto me.

Christ, in this triumphant entry, gives a representation of the church, for which he came to triumph by his death, and which he designed to compose of two sorts of people—the Jews, accustomed to the yoke of the law, and the Gentiles, who had never borne it. The Christian, consisting of two parts, serves the law of God according to the Spirit, and the law of sin according to the flesh. By the bonds which tied these creatures, thou showest me, O Lord, my bondage under the law of sin; but at the same time thou showest me, that thou art

about to untie them, and to leave to thy church, and the ministers of it, the power of loosing sinners, Jews and Gentiles, without distinction.

3. And if any *man* say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

Jesus Christ, still uniform in his conduct, is always intent on humbling himself, that he may prepare a remedy for our pride; and on setting off his humiliations by marks of his almighty power, that he may establish the belief of his divinity. Nothing resists his will, when he intends to loose the sinner, or make use of him for his own purposes and designs.

4. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5. Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

See to what the outward magnificence of this triumph is reduced! but to the sight of God, nothing can appear more great and magnificent, than a God who despises greatness and magnificence so far as to divest himself thereof, and who teaches the great ones of the earth to despise it, even while they possess it. What an example is here, that the son of God should come meek, and full of gentleness, to those whose hearts he knew to be full of hatred and rage against himself, and entirely employed in contriving his death, and that he should come even to deliver himself up to them! This is such an instance of charity, as will cover the revengeful with shame, and overwhelm them at the tribunal of God, if they do not profit by it. The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of meekness and of love, by which he subdues both Jews and Gentiles—the spirit and the flesh.

6. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

A ready and faithful obedience to the word of Jesus Christ is a sacrifice due to him from the reason and will of man. When God commands, there is no time for dispute. Whenever, by his order and authority, we undertake to loose souls, and to bring them to Christ, we must do our duty in following his instructions, without regarding the censures of men. There may happen some certain occasions, wherein, through zeal to

serve souls and obey Christ, we are obliged to expose ourselves to grievous and mortifying suspicions; as the disciples here expose themselves to pass for robbers. Herein they imitate their Master beforehand, who was treated as such at the time of his death, being crucified between two thieves.

7. And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set *him* thereon.

All here is mystery and instruction. Pastors should learn from hence to strip and divest themselves of every thing, that they may prepare souls for the reception of Jesus Christ as their King; to cover the sins of others with the garment of an inviolable secresy; to hide their infirmities by a wise condescension, their bashfulness by a preventing charity; and to spare nothing which may engage them to take upon them the yoke of Christ, and to carry Christ himself in their hearts, by a sincere faith and imitation of his virtues.

8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed *them* in the way.

The people celebrate Christ's triumph over their hearts without knowing it. Their simple and more sincere faith renders them more disposed to receive him and his word. God accepts more favourably the artless praise and small offerings of the poor, than the studied praises of the learned, and the magnificent presents of the great. We do not see here either learned, or rich, or great men come to meet Christ, and contribute to the glory of his triumph; this is for them a very bad presage: knowledge, which puffs up, being not apt to incline men to the obedience of faith, nor riches to the love of poverty, nor greatness to the humility of Christ.

9. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Some praise Jesus Christ to-day, who will crucify him to-morrow by their sins. See the vanity of the world's applause! To-day men acknowledge Christ to be the Son of David and the Messias; and we shall presently hear them renounce him, require his blood, and place him below thieves and murderers. There are abundance of these well-meaning, but weak souls,

who would die for the truth when there is nothing to fear; but who, as soon as it is attacked, are the first who turn their backs upon it, and declare against it. All the Scriptures give witness to Jesus Christ,—the Old which preceded, as well as the New which followed him. Let us read and meditate on them all with reverence and faith.

10. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

That saving trouble with which the elect are affected at the belief of Christ's coming, is very different from that trouble of envy and infidelity, which the establishment of his kingdom causes in the wicked. Had he come to flatter the passions of men, he would then have been welcome to the world; but the world would not have been converted. Had he adapted himself to the desires of sinful men, they would not indeed have been moved or troubled at his coming; but then they could have had no Saviour. This is a dreadful instance of forgetfulness and ingratitude, to ask who Christ is, after so many wonders and miracles! Such is the forgetfulness of a sinner, who, having been healed and sanctified by his grace, loses it afterward through his ingratitude.

11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

The people are readier to acknowledge and confess Jesus Christ than the great; but faith and piety, which have not yet been tried, are very unsteadfast and wavering. Those truths of the gospel, which, in some season or other of their lives, many have known and commended, will serve only to condemn them at the judgment of God.

SECT. II.—THE BUYERS AND SELLERS CAST OUT OF THE TEMPLE.—LITTLE CHILDREN COMMENDED.

12. ¶ And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

Avarice, covered with the veil of religion, is one of those things upon which Christ looks with the greatest indignation in his church. It is a sure mark of the terrible punishments

which he reserves for the profaners of his true temple, the church, that he suffers in it those whose very shadow and figure he would not suffer in the Jewish temple. Merchandise of holy things, simoniacal presentations, fraudulent exchanges, a mercenary spirit in sacred functions; ecclesiastical employments, obtained by flattery, service, or attendance, or by any thing which is instead of money; collations, nominations, and elections, made on any other motive than the glory of God, and the good of the church,—these are all fatal and damnable profanations, of which those in the temple were only a shadow.

13. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

If to do common and ordinary actions in a temple, which contained no more than a figure of the Christian mysteries, denominate a man a thief in God's house; what name do those deserve, who, by criminal and scandalous discourses, by lascivious looks and shameful dresses, profane the churches where Christ is present? They who are placed in the church on purpose to serve souls, and do not do it; or who enjoy the revenues of the church, and neglect the service of it, are thieves in more senses than one.

14. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

Jesus Christ soon returns to his kind and charitable inclination, whatever cause of anger has been given him; how can we refuse to imitate him with respect to our brethren? After having condemned the profane use of the house of God, he shows what is the holy and lawful use of it; namely, by prayer, adoration, praise, and sacrifice, to use our utmost endeavours to obtain the cure of those who are under the blindness of sin, and the lameness of irregular affections; or to enlighten them by the divine word.

15. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,

The blindness and obstinacy of priests and teachers are generally the effect of ambition, avarice, and pride. Would

to God, that they who ought most to promote the advancement of his work, and the kingdom of Christ, were not too often those who obstruct and hinder it the most! The envy, jealousy, and worldly interest of corrupt ecclesiastics, will ever do more mischief to the church than her declared enemies. The most wonderful success of holy bishops, their reputation, and the veneration which the people have for them, are so far from gaining the hearts of their secret enemies, that they do but exasperate them the more.

16. And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

A great reputation is a very great crime, when a man has envious, incensed, or powerful enemies. It is not always a well-regulated humility to disavow praise and public esteem, when the glory of God and of truth is concerned. The praise of the common people is least to be suspected, because they are least capable of affectation and artifice. God willingly accepts the praises of the simple, because his Spirit draws them out of their mouths.

17. ¶ And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

It is wisdom not to persist in endeavouring to instruct those who are blinded with envy. When a pastor has discharged all he owes to truth and the dignity of his office, he should consider what is due to prudence and humility, giving way for a time to the envy of his enemies, and withdrawing himself from the excessive affection of his friends.

SECT. III.—THE FIG-TREE WITHERED.—THE PRAYER WITH FAITH.

18. Now in the morning, as he returned into the city, he hungered.

How barren is the friendship of men toward Jesus Christ. Their hard-heartedness often leaves his members to suffer hunger as well as himself. We may conclude, from his hunger, that his triumph was followed by fasting and prayer, two powerful means to suppress human complacency, and expel the poison of applause. Christ had no need of these pre-

servatives himself, but his members wanted this example and instruction.

19. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

Can the Christian, who affords Jesus Christ nothing but barren words and desires, expect any thing but his malediction and curse? We must continually watch, and employ ourselves in good works, especially those of our salvation, still expecting the hour when Christ will come to demand the fruit of all his gifts and graces. A fig tree in the way, and a Christian exposed to all the temptations of the world, either bear or preserve but very little fruit. Dryness and barrenness are, without comparison, more terrible in the other world, where there is not the least hope of any more grace. Let us take great care not to let the season pass which is proper for producing fruit; one moment will deprive us of it all.

20. And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

The desertion and malediction of sinners ought to strike even the just with fear and amazement. We say every day one to another, See how suddenly this man died; but who takes warning by such examples? What we say to-day of others, will perhaps be said to-morrow of us. God is more to be admired in the fertility which he restores to trees and plants every year, than in the sterility wrought by him in this fig tree; but the more wonders he produces, the less we admire them.

21. Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

Nothing is impossible to a faith which doubts not; but this faith is very rare. Few or no miracles are done in our days, because there is so little faith, and so little necessity for them.

22. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Faith is the source of prayer. The measure of faith is the

measure of our success in prayer; and prayer is the interpreter of faith; it nourishes, increases, preserves, and makes it fruitful in good works. Abundance of people pray, but few proportion the fervency, humility, and perseverance of their prayers to the greatness of those gifts for which they pray. The church is the house of prayer, because it is the house of faith. Whoever prays not within the pale or faith of it, pray unprofitably, and somewhat worse.

SECT. IV.—CHRIST IS ASKED CONCERNING HIS AUTHORITY.—PUBLICANS AND HARLOTS PREFERRED TO THE PHARISEES.

23. ¶ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

The wicked cannot believe that the authority which condemns their maxims is lawful; and are always ready to oppose it. It happens but too frequently in the church, that other persons, as well as the wicked, interrupt the chief pastors in the exercise of their proper functions, by carrying on unjust actions and vexatious suits against their authority and jurisdiction. The miracles of Jesus Christ are a sufficient proof of his authority; Scripture shows that of his ministers.

24. And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

The wisdom of God very easily finds means to confound the designs and malice of men. It is not out of a spirit contrary to simplicity, that our blessed Lord opposes one question to another; but to expose the insincerity of the enemies of his ministry, and to hinder them from obstructing the gospel. There is a pious dexterity and address, as well as criminal and wicked artifices.

25. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? 26. But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

One single word of the Son of God puts a stop to the malice, and disconcerts all the wisdom, of the world. Simplicity gives a wonderful confidence and peace of mind; double-dealing

causes a thousand disquiets and troubles. To what extremity are they reduced, whom envy and obstinacy engage to oppose those whom God sends to instruct them? They are forced even to confess their incredulity, and to acknowledge themselves set only against that which is good. Let a man do his utmost to conceal within his own heart the conviction which he has of truth and innocence, to avoid yielding thereto, or being condemned before men; God, who sees the heart, will, by the light of the last day, produce it as a witness against him, and make it his judge.

27. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

They who are once engaged against the truth, never scruple a lie. Pharisaical pride, according to its different interests, prompts men equally, either to pretend to know every thing, or to affect to know nothing. By a real ignorance, God often punishes the feigned and counterfeit ignorance of the envious, who will not acknowledge the good which they see in others.

28. ¶ But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

Labour is the universal penance imposed on all the children of Adam, and yet all the world declines it. Our soul is not our own. It is the vineyard of God, which we ought to cultivate by fulfilling his commands; and this not out of self-love, but for the love of him. That which would have been the delight of man in innocency, is become a painful work to him since his fall.

29. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went.

The just perceive at first the opposition of nature to obedience; but grace remains victorious. How happy is it for a man to receive the gift of repentance, when he has been so unhappy as to transgress the divine law in the first years of his life! There are very few Christians who have not lost their innocence by disobeying God; and very few sinners, who, touched with true remorse, "bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

30. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I *go*, sir; and went not.

The pretended just man is full of presumption, and very eager to embrace the good proposed to him,—he promises every thing, and performs nothing. Christian righteousness consists not in making ostentation of a great zeal for God's law, or of great application to every thing which contributes to make it more understood, nor in appearing always ready to fulfil it; but in fulfilling it with humility, exactness, and perseverance. Men often deceive themselves in this matter; there are abundance of false lovers of the gospel.

31. Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

True repentance saves the greatest sinners; a false righteousness does but blind and harden the worldly-wise the more. Men recover more easily from gross and public disorders, than from a false righteousness and secret pride, which corrupt the whole life, and lull the sinner asleep.

32. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

If the word and good example had been sufficient for conversion, what sinners would not St. John have converted? Pride, which is the greatest obstacle thereto, requires other remedies. When a soul is not wrought upon, either by the innocency of the just, or the repentance of sinners, what hope can be entertained of its salvation? Worldly men perish continually amid all sorts of good examples. That of saints, frights and discourages them; that of great sinners converted, they are ashamed to follow; and that of the generality of good men is not strong enough to affect or stir them. It belongs to thee only, O Lord, to render all these examples useful, and to make them subservient to thy designs concerning souls!

SECT. V.—THE PARABLE OF THE HUSBANDMEN.

33. ¶ Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a

far country: 34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. 35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

This is a representation of the perfidiousness of the Jews. The vineyard is the synagogue; the hedge, the divine protection; the winepress, the law; the tower, the temple and sacrifices; and the husbandmen, the priests and doctors of the law. How great ought the fidelity and gratitude of Christians to be, who have received the truth and substance of all these things in Jesus Christ! The vineyard is now the church; the hedge, the faith which separates it from Jews and heretics; the winepress, the sacrament from whence the blood of Christ, and the merits of his cross, stream into our souls; the tower is the promise of his presence and protection against all the powers of hell; the husbandmen are the pastors; and the far country is heaven, whither Christ ascended, having given them his mission and authority.

36. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

The church, which has existed in all times, has, according to the difference of them, had prophets, apostles, pastors, and teachers. There is not a moment in which God does not shower down his gifts upon us, and require the fruit of them. The church has been persecuted in all ages, under the law and under the gospel, under the prophets and under Jesus Christ; and the greatest share of persecution has still fallen on the ministers of it. There have been always good and bad husbandmen; and the former have still been ill used by the latter. How happy is the lot of those who have faith enough to choose rather to suffer in serving the church, than to enjoy worldly peace by declining the service of it!

37. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

The Son of God incarnate, by his word, his example, his mysteries, and his ministers, demands the fruit of those graces which God has bestowed on mankind. Neither the infidelity of the Jews, nor their abuse of God's benefits, could put a stop to his goodness, or hinder him from sending his Son into

the world. My God, how far from this spirit are the children of Adam! The least trifle is enough to raise their resentment, and to stifle their good-will.

38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

The sinner, to enjoy the miserable peace of his sin, would destroy both Christ and his gospel, if it were in his power. To conspire against the church and its doctrine, as heretics do, is to conspire against Jesus Christ. We put him to death in every one of his members, which, by the poison of bad doctrine, example, or conduct, we rob of the life of faith and grace; or deprive of the food of prayer, of the word, and of the body and blood of Christ.

39. And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*.

Let us take great heed, lest, while we detest these murderers of the Son of God, we ourselves be reckoned of their number, on the account of our corrupt will. To be rejected and crucified by the Jews, who knew him not, was less grievous to him than to be despised and outraged by Christians, who make profession of adoring him. To cast him out of our heart, is to "cast him out of the vineyard," which he has purchased with his blood, and to take away the life which he had in us. How many hearts are guilty of murder in the sight of God! How many, which are at least a prison, where Jesus Christ is detained captive!

40. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? 41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

Jews and wicked Christians shall both be terribly punished; but the latter so much the more severely, as the gifts they have received are more excellent, and their ingratitude more abominable. If the first coming of Christ, which was all grace and mercy, proved so fatal to the Jews, by reason of their incredulity, how terrible will his second, consisting all of justice and vengeance, be to such Christians as have not lived according to their faith? Faith, without the fruits of

it, distinguishes the Christian from the Jew, to no other end but his condemnation. We must render these fruits in their season, and that season lasts all our life.

SECT. VI.—THE CORNER-STONE.

42. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

They had read these words, but with a veil over their eyes, which hindered them from perceiving Jesus Christ, and their own heinous crime therein. What wonders should we discover in the Scriptures, if the corruption of our heart did not draw a veil like theirs over our eyes! How admirable would Christ appear to us in them, if we had but an earnest desire to find him there! This passage contains an abridgment of the whole knowledge of Jesus Christ: (1.) He is the workmanship of God by way of eminence. (2.) He was rejected, humbled, and crucified by the Jews. (3.) Raised again by his Father. (4.) Constituted the head and foundation of the church. (5.) Made the cement and union of its members, and the peace of Jews and Gentiles. (6.) Rendered the object of the joy and admiration of the faithful,—an object which ought continually to employ them here, and which will yield them eternal happiness hereafter.

43. Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation* bringing forth the fruits thereof. [* *Fr.* people.]

What we see here, in this just rejection of the Jews, and merciful calling of the Gentiles, is fulfilled every day in particular persons. Let not those, who seem the most forsaken, despair, any more than the Gentiles, of the mercy of God. Let not those, whom he has favoured the most, be too much exalted thereby; but let them fear the miserable lot of the chosen and beloved people. None but a God could, with so much freedom and resolution, pronounce on his enemies the sentence of their condemnation. He who did it must needs have a great desire to die. And it was his earnest zeal to do his Father's will, and to form his chosen people, which kindled this desire in his heart. Christ answers for the fidelity of his

people, who are his members; because he will himself engrave his laws upon their minds, and write them in their hearts. For it is he who produces in them, by his grace, the fruits which they bring forth by their will. Lord, since by thy mercy I am of the number of thy people, do thou cause me to bring forth the fruits of the kingdom of God.

44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

All the vain efforts of Christ's enemies, while he was on earth, served only to the establishment of his designs, and to the confusion of all those who opposed them. But how dreadful will it be, when the storms of his vengeance shall fall upon the enemies of his kingdom and glory, after his resurrection, and at his second coming! They who, being scandalized at the humiliations of the Son of God, and the ignominy of the cross, rejected him before his resurrection, are those who fell on this stone, and were broken; but yet had opportunities of being converted, after the descent of the Holy Ghost. But as for those who, after the glory of his resurrection, and the miraculous effects of the Holy Ghost in the establishment of the church, continued still obdurate, this stone, lifted up to heaven, fell upon them at the destruction of Jerusalem; and will again fall upon them at his last coming, and grind them to powder.

45. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

The word of Jesus Christ darts light sometimes into the heart of the wicked, but such light as blinds and hardens them the more. The most wholesome advice passes for an affront with those who have shut their hearts against the truth. When that which should incline men to repentance does only kindle the flame of spite and revenge, there is no more hope of salvation, without a very extraordinary grace.

46. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

He who abstains from evil, only through fear of punishment, commits it in his heart, and is already guilty before God. Men are apt to fear those who can kill the body; but

they fear not him who can destroy both body and soul eternally. A true pastor fears nothing but God, when his glory is concerned; a hireling fears every thing, except him whom only he ought to fear.

CHAPTER XXII.

SECT. I.—THE PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE-FEAST.—THE WEDDING GARMENT.

1. And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, 2. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

The Jews were the first who were called to the belief of the incarnation, wherein Jesus Christ espoused the human nature and the church. He chooses the most strict, tender, fruitful, and most inviolable of all alliances, to make us comprehend how intimate and advantageous to the Christian soul that union is, which God is pleased to have with it in his Son, by faith and charity. What may we not expect from a royal alliance! For what may we not hope from a divine union!

3. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

The law, the prophets, and the gospel are but so many different invitations to the wedding of Jesus Christ, to the belief and fruits of his incarnation. By these nuptials, which are yet only begun, the creature is already become one spirit and one heart with God; how then will it be, when, this marriage being consummated, he will admit the creature to a participation of all his treasure, perfect his charity in it, and make it live eternally for himself! This union with God is contracted very freely; and no man can be forced or necessitated to it; for it is an immediate union of will to will, of heart to heart; and it is by willing and consenting, that we come to God and Jesus Christ.

4. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are

bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and *my* fatlings *are* killed, and all things *are* ready: come unto the marriage.

God's patience is not wearied by the denial and resistance of man's heart. He seems as earnestly desirous of uniting it to himself, as if some great advantage would accrue to him thereby; whereas in truth he finds nothing in it but poverty, misery, and corruption; and, on the contrary, the heart finds in him wisdom, holiness, greatness, riches, and all things which make a perfect, infinite, and incomprehensible felicity. Jesus Christ is himself the true victim of God, slain for us, to which we are invited, and of which we ought to partake, the sacrifice of the Christian covenant, and the marriage-feast and banquet; and it is by eating of it that this union is completed,—here under the veil of the sacrament, but in heaven openly and without any veil.

5. But they made light of *it*, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: 6. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated *them* spitefully, and slew *them*.

There are three sorts of states, wherein men run the risk of living in a continual forgetfulness and neglect of salvation. The first, is that of a soft, idle, and voluptuous life, wherein a man thinks of nothing, but quietly to enjoy life, health, riches, conveniences, good cheer, public diversions, and private pleasures. This is the life of a man of fortune and pleasure. The second state of life, is that of a man entirely taken up with worldly business, merchandise, the public revenues, or any gainful employment, in which the love of riches, and application to the means of acquiring them, generally stifle all thoughts of salvation, and engross all that time which should be set apart for the prosecution of it. The third state, is that of men openly unjust, violent, and outrageously wicked, who are sinners as it were by profession, in the face of the world, and who not only neglect their salvation, but are incensed against all those who exhort them to mind it, and impartially declare to them the truth. Permit us not, Lord, ever to be forgetful of thee in any state, or to be engaged in such as are inconsistent with salvation!

7. But when the king heard *thereof*, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

God, either sooner or later, takes vengeance on men for their contempt of his word and truth, and for their injurious treatment of his ministers. The punishment of the Jews, by the destruction of Jerusalem, which is here prefigured, is itself but a figure and shadow of the punishment of Christians. Death, which to the saints is the beginning of their happiness, to the reprobate is the beginning of the eternal vengeance of God. The city of this present world, which they make their earthly paradise, is then burnt up and destroyed as to them.

8. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

The substitution of the Gentiles in the room of the Jews, denotes to us another substitution much more to be dreaded. Grace is often taken away from a wicked Christian, and given to others. No person is excluded from the feast, except he be unworthy; though no man is of himself worthy to be admitted to it. Deplorable was the blindness of the Jews, who knew not the feast which was prepared for them; but more deplorable is that of a Christian, [professor,] who, after having tasted and fed deliciously on it, loathes and nauseates it, and leaves it, to return to his vomit.

9. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. 10. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

There is no respect of persons in the business of salvation. All sorts of sinners are invited to it, Jews and Gentiles, and the poor who have no settled abode, more than the rich and great ones of the world. The church is everywhere represented as visible, and containing both good and bad, righteous and wicked, united together by the participation of the same sacraments. Abundance of Christians are present at the table of the eucharistical feast, who will never be seen at the eternal table of God. Let us tremble at the thought!

11. ¶ And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: 12. And he saith unto him,

Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Let every man learn from hence, to examine and judge himself, and to abstain from the holy table, until he has put on the wedding-garment; conformably to the apostle's injunction, which Christ authorizes so long before by this parable. Thus we may prevent this dreadful separation, which will certainly be followed by an eternal excommunication. It is by faith that we come to the wedding-feast; it is by charity which is the life, and by good works which are the fruits of faith, that we are qualified to eat the flesh of the Lamb, and to receive nourishment from it. Among a thousand unworthy communicants, perhaps there is but one, whose conscience upbraids him after this manner, How camest thou in hither? Happy is he, if amended thereby. No answer can be made at the tribunal of God. The confusion arising from sin, and the conscience of the sinner, will stop his mouth.

13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

See here the sad state and total interdiction of a damned soul. No more feet to run to God's mercy, or to flee from his justice. No more hands to do good, or to make any amends for evil. No more light whereby to know God or his own duty. Nothing but darkness, pain, grief, tears, rage, fury, and despair remains for those who are cast out from the wedding-feast. This is the fruit of sin, and especially of the abuse of faith, grace, and the holy communion.

14. For many are called, but few *are* chosen.

Many are called by the law of nature, by the written law, and by the preaching of the gospel; but few are there who come in by faith; few among these who live by faith; and few, even of these last, who persevere in the life of faith. The elect are not known until the separation is made. One single reprobate cast out represents all the rest. God sometimes manifests his justice on a sinner, even in this world, on purpose to awaken all others; with whom he either bears, in expectation of their repentance, or whom he reserves for

the torments of hell. Let us strive to be of the small number.

SECT. II.—GOD AND CESAR.

15. ¶ Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk.

The devil's ministers, like himself, retire only for a while; but never lay aside the design of destroying virtuous people. Of all wicked persons, the envious are the least discouraged at disappointments. The good and pious ought strictly to watch over their words, because the world is always vigilant to make them serve its interests or passions. Set a watch, O Lord, upon my mouth, and secure it from being surprised either by the devil, or the world, or my own corrupt desires!

16. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man:* for thou regardest not the person of men.

The praises of the world are full of snares: he who loves them, loves temptation; and to love it, is to be willing to perish. The wicked scarcely ever make any other use of good, but only to promote their malicious designs. Real enemies and false friends take advantage very often of the good qualities which they discover in us, so as to make us act indiscreetly, and to put us upon imprudent measures. The fidelity which an ecclesiastical person owes to his ministry, banishes all fear of men from his mind; but agrees very well with Christian prudence, which is neither rash nor insensible. There are some regards which proceed from timorousness, ambition, and complaisance, but there are also others, which spring from charity, discretion, and prudence.

17. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cesar, or not?

It is one of the common artifices of ill men, to set the spiritual and temporal powers at variance if possible; to engage princes in the disputes about doctrine and religion; and to find some means to render those odious whom they design to ruin. When the enemies of truth are undeniably convinced, their last shift is to make their adversaries pass for

persons disaffected to the state, and to cry out against them as a faction. We must be sure not to give any occasion for this charge, but must avoid even the least appearance of deserving it.

18. But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, *ye* hypocrites?

They know but little of Christ, to whom the very bottom of the heart is open, who hope to conceal the wickedness of it from him. It is of great advantage to expose the designs of hypocrites, and to cover them with shame in order to render their calumnies ineffectual. We ought not to suffer the mask of piety, and a false love of truth, to remain on those who take it with no other design but to obstruct truth and piety itself.

19. Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.
20. And he saith unto them, Whose *is* this image and superscription?

Nothing but the wisdom of God can teach us to avoid the snares of men, without wounding truth or justice, without interesting our own passions, and without flattering or provoking those of others. When we make the divine truth and wisdom the standard of our words, we then weigh them as we ought. Christ seems not to know the tribute money: (1.) To recommend to us a contempt of riches. (2.) To show, that he did not concern himself about secular affairs. (3.) To confound his enemies by their own answer.

21 They say unto him, Cesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

This is an answer full of wisdom, which establishes the limits, regulates the rights, and distinguishes the jurisdiction of the two empires of heaven and earth, of the spiritual and temporal powers. The image of princes stamped on their coin, dènotes that temporal things belong all to their governance; and the image of God imprinted on the soul of man, teaches that whatever use he makes either of himself or of the creatures, ought to be referred to God. Respect, submission, dependence, and obedience to sovereign princes, as to whatever is temporal, being part of the divine law, we can-

not pay them as we ought in the sight of God, but by doing it heartily, and on a principle of love. Princes being more the images of God than other men, ought also to render to God whatever they receive from men, by directing it all to his glory.

22. When they had heard *these words*, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

They cannot forbear admiring him, and yet they cannot persuade themselves to love him; the hardness of their heart resists the light of their understanding. Thus worldly persons admire good preachers, praise good men, and approve good actions, through a kind of natural integrity of heart; but yet are not converted for all this.

SECT. III.—THE RESURRECTION, AND ANGELICAL STATE.

23. ¶ The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,

One temptation succeeds another. It is not to be expected that the devil should let those rest who boldly attack him, and labour to destroy his kingdom. He uses his utmost endeavours to render the preaching, miracles, and whole mission of Christ ineffectual, by overturning the very foundation of all—the belief of the resurrection. Few persons openly deny it; the generality live as if they did not believe it.

24. Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

In this was a figure of Christ, who was fruitful only after he was dead, and even by his death itself. The apostles, as being his brethren according to the human nature, raise up children; who therefore all bear his name, and not theirs. The expectation of the Messias, and the desire of having a share in his birth according to the flesh, which was the chief ambition of the Jews, gave occasion to this law. But now we have a share in his birth, by faith and the Spirit; and more perfectly by the barrenness of virginity, than by the fruitfulness of marriage.

25. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto

his brother: 26. Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27. And last of all the woman died also. 28. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.

Sensualists fear the loss of carnal pleasures in the other world. They are always mistaken, either in referring to the present life the truths of the other, or in entertaining dishonourable notions of this last, and applying to it those mysteries and truths which belong to the church here below, and to the forming of the mystical body of Christ. The devil amuses men with cares suited to their inclinations. Curious questions are a dangerous temptation in the church, and produce libertines therein. The truths of the resurrection of the body, and of the immortality of the soul, disturb and perplex these men the most, and therefore they attack them on every side, and by all the ways imaginable.

29. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.

Let us be sure not to judge of God, of his designs, and of his works, by the power of reason alone; this is to derogate nature, from the infinity of his being, and the incomprehensibility of his greatness. There are two causes of the opposition of men to the truths of Christianity. The first is, in that they do not sufficiently understand the Scriptures for want of due application, zeal, faith, reverence, and humility; they will not frequent the school of God, in order to learn that which he vouchsafes to teach them concerning himself. The second, which flows from the former, is, in that they frame to themselves too mean an idea of his greatness, holiness, and power over his creatures; of his wisdom, conduct, and designs concerning his elect; and of that eternal life which he bestows on his saints, in himself, without any human means. It is a very great temerity to pretend to measure the eternal and infinite reason, and the omnipotency of the Creator, by the weak and corrupt reason of the creature.

30. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

All the alliances and unions here on earth are tokens and effects of man's indigence and mortality. When once he shall

enter into eternity, where all his desires will be satisfied, all his wants supplied, and his mortality swallowed up in glory; then all unions and societies shall be lost in the union and society with God. The less intercourse and union we have with the creature, the more have we with the Creator. Happy is that soul, which, even in this world, begins the life of angels, by separating itself from every thing, that it may live only to God, and for him alone as his spouse! Charity can render us like to angels in spirit; virginity only makes us resemble them in body as well as spirit.

31. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 32. I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

God, who is the God, that is, the bountiful, magnificent, and almighty Rewarder of the righteous—whom he recompenses in proportion to his own love and their fidelity—declared to Moses, long after the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he was even then their God in this sense, and in a manner altogether peculiar. Now, if they were not present with God, and in his sight, any more than they were present with men, he could not style himself their God in so particular a manner. For the advantages they received on earth were not sufficient to verify this divine promise in respect of them. And therefore it is absolutely necessary that they should enjoy another life, and that their souls, which still subsist, should one day be reunited to their bodies, to receive in them such advantage as may make it evident that God is their God, and their reward in a most extraordinary manner.

33. And when the multitude heard *this*, they were astonished at his doctrine.

God permits the infidelity of some, for the instruction and edification of others; the offences taken by the world, for the trial and manifestation of those who belong to him; and heresies, for the greater illustration of the truth. The doctrine of the church, when cleared and explained by holy men, appears the more admirable the more odious heretics have endeavoured to render it to the people. Thus God knows how

to bring good out of evil, light out of darkness, and to discover the lustre of truth through the cloud which the wickedness of false teachers has cast upon it.

SECT. IV.—THE LOVE OF GOD AND OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

34. ¶ But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

Those who are powerful in wickedness are always striving to succeed better in it than others. The admiration of the people, and the putting the Sadduccees to silence, instead of discouraging envy, excite and stir it up. A wicked man takes no joy in the mortification of one enemy, when another more odious is exalted thereby, and thinks of nothing but how to deprive the last of the advantage he has gained.

35. Then one of them *which was* a lawyer, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying, 36. Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law?

We see here three kinds of enemies and false accusers of Christ and his disciples, and three sorts of accusations brought against them, which are to the latter so many occasions of temptation: (1.) The Herodians, or the politicians and courtiers, who form their accusation on the rights of the prince, and on matters of state, (v. 16.) (2.) The Sadducees, or the heretics and libertines, who build theirs upon the foundation of religion and faith, (v. 23.) (3.) The Pharisees, or the loose casuists and pretenders to devotion, who ground theirs upon morality, and chiefly upon the love of God, in this place.

37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

If to love God with all the heart be to seek, adhere to, and rest in him alone, for his own sake; and to seek, adhere to, and take pleasure in nothing, but only so far as it is conformable to his will, as it may be referred to his glory, or be useful to our own salvation, to that of our neighbour, or to the good of the church,—we may then be assured, that the number of those who love God from the bottom of their heart is much smaller than we imagine. There must be no thoughts nor designs in the mind, no desires nor motions in the will, no

business nor actions in the life, but what must have the love of God for their principle, and his glory for their end.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

The greatest sins are those which are committed against the love of God, because this is the first and great commandment. And it is so: (1.) In antiquity, being as old as the world, and engraven in our very nature. (2.) In dignity, as directly and immediately respecting God. (3.) In excellence, being the commandment of the new covenant, and the spirit of the divine adoption. (4.) In justice, because it alone renders to God his due, prefers him before all things, and secures to him his proper rank in relation to them. (5.) In sufficiency, being sufficient of itself to make men holy in this life, and happy in the other. (6.) In fruitfulness, because it includes all the other commandments, and is the root of them all. (7.) In virtue and efficacy, because by this alone God reigns in the heart of man, and man is united to God. (8.) In extent, leaving nothing to the creature which it does not refer to the Creator. (9.) In necessity, being indispensable. (10.) In duration, as being never to be discontinued on earth, and to continue eternally in heaven. How then, my God, can any one forbear loving thee? yet how can any one possibly love thee, unless thou thyself vouchsafest to inspire this love into him?

39. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

The love of our neighbour is found in the love of God, as in its principle, pattern, and end; and the love of God is reciprocally found in the love of our neighbour, as in its effect, representation, and infallible mark. We take nothing from God when we love our neighbour for his sake. To love him as ourselves, is to love him as we ought to love ourselves, in observing the order of charity; and not as we love ourselves when we follow our own irregular inclination. It is but one and the same love, which loves God in our neighbour, and our neighbour for God's sake, when we desire that his name may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, and that his will

may be done in our neighbour after the same manner that we desire it for ourselves.

40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The Scripture contains and commands nothing but charity. How extensive soever our external performance of the divine law may be, we always transgress a part of it when we perform it not for God's sake; because, by this neglect, we fail in the observation of the great precept concerning loving him, which is included in every part of his law. This double precept, concerning the love of God and of our neighbour, is the summary of all the divine and positive commandments, the compendious direction and way to salvation, the Bible of the simple and ignorant, and the book which even the most learned will never thoroughly understand in this life.

SECT. V.—CHRIST THE SON AND LORD OF DAVID.

41. ¶ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42. Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The son* of David.

Jesus here asks a question in his turn, not to tempt, but to instruct his disciples; to confound the obstinate, to point out the source of all their captious questions, namely, their ignorance of the prophecies which foretold the Messias; to furnish his church with weapons against the Jews in all ages; and, by this last public instruction, to establish the truth of his divinity, incarnation, power, and kingdom, as the foundation of all religion.

43. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, 44. The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? 45. If David then call him, Lord, how is he his son?

This psalm appears to be a prophecy concerning the Messias, by the explication of Christ himself, from the confession of his enemies, and according to the general opinion of those times. We herein find sufficient proof of the divinity of Christ the son of David, not in the manner in which the Jews understood it, but as David had foretold it by the Holy Ghost: Christ being at the same time the Son of God, equal to him

in power, and heir of all things. His kingdom will not have its full consummation till all his enemies are destroyed, and especially sin and death.

46. And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any *man* from that day forth ask him any more *questions.*

Truth at length triumphs through the wisdom and word of Christ; but the defender of it will, notwithstanding, be oppressed in the sight of men. An important instruction this, to teach us not to judge of truth by what those who defend it suffer. The more triumphant it is by their ministry, the more they must expect to suffer and be humbled, in order to counterbalance their vanity, to render them conformable to Christ, to purify them from human infirmities, to make them capable of a greater reward, and to show that it is not by the endeavours of men that truth gains a triumph, but by the God of truth itself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SECT. I.—THE CHAIR OF MOSES.—PROUD RABBINS.

1. Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2. Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

Let us learn to look always with respect on Christ and his authority, even in the most imperfect of his ministers. The doctrine of truth which God has placed in the church, loses nothing of its value by the ill lives of its ministers. That which proceeds from their corrupt will belongs indeed to them, and must be rejected; but the truth and authority which they have from Christ and his apostles belong to God, and ought to be inviolable. The faith is not built upon the lives of pastors, but upon the visible authority of the church, which warrants nothing but what she has received from Jesus Christ by the hand of the apostles and their successors.

3. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

It is a very great delusion for men to reject good doctrine,

to refuse obedience, and not to improve by instruction, under pretence of the ill conduct of their pastors. If these are more to be condemned for exposing the simple to this temptation, they are not, however, the less to be believed on this account when they teach sound doctrine. See here the admirable providence of God, who has been pleased to make the authority which is to be followed more visible, than the bad example which is to be avoided; to this end, that the faith and salvation of the illiterate might not depend either on disquisitions whereof they are not capable, or on the ill example of some pastors, which might possibly draw them away, if they had not a visible and standing rule by which they may and ought to judge of their manners. Let us not without necessity search into the lives of our pastors; nor approve them when they are manifestly disorderly. The first mark of the irregular life of a pastor is, his not living according to those evangelical maxims which he teaches.

4. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.

The second mark of the corruption of a pastor is, his being severe to others and indulgent to himself. That which is grievous only to corrupt nature, when left to its own weakness, is not the heavy burden of which Christ speaks in this place, but that which a pharisaical severity or indiscreet ignorance imposes on the weak, contrary either to the letter or to the spirit of the gospel. Repentance seems not impossible to any but the impenitent; nor the holy rigour of the gospel grievous to be borne, except only to carnal and sensual minds. The yoke of it is easy and the burden light, when God inclines a man to bear them, by inspiring the love of mortification, and the spirit of repentance. They who preach repentance to others, and do not perform it themselves, render this yoke more heavy, and the necessity of it less credible. Nothing is a better proof that it is not impossible, than to see it practised by those who recommend it. Gentleness, discretion, and a good example, are necessary qualifications of a pastor.

5. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

The third mark of a pastor's irregular life is, when he affects to appear righteous, and a great observer of the law, as the Pharisees did, in wearing larger phylacteries, or borders of parchment, in which the words of the law were written, and longer fringes, which were a mark of distinction from the Gentiles, or a sign of greater piety. There is a medium between a humility which would hide, and a vanity which would make a show of every thing; we must endeavour to find it. A pastor owes an example; but it is an example of humility, as much, and more than of any thing else. A man must have the love of the law engraven in his heart, to be a true observer of it in the sight of God. An exactness without ostentation, and works the sole end of which is God, are the things whereby the people must be edified. He who labours only to gain the esteem of men, has nothing to expect from God but the punishment of his vanity. Singularity in dress is suspicious and blamable; but modesty is no part of singularity, how singular soever the torrent of vanity and extravagance may make it appear.

6. And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.

The fourth sign that a pastor's life is not regular is, when he loves to have the chief place. For it is one certain mark of a Pharisee to be always desirous of distinguishing himself from others, either in the sacred ministry, or in the conversation of civil life. A man may take the first place when it is due to his dignity or rank; he ought sometimes to take it, that he may not give up a right with which he is only intrusted; and he may likewise accept it when offered by civility; but he must never seek it, or be greatly delighted with it, out of a love of preference.

7. And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

The fifth mark of a pastor's irregularity is, his loving public honours. The sixth and last, his being vainly pleased with great names and titles. It is a misfortune to weak and imperfect Christians, to be in a rank and station to which some

extraordinary honours are affixed. They are puffed up when they receive them; provoked when they are not given; they require them with haughtiness, possess them with fondness, defend them with heat, lose them with grief and regret, and pursue the recovery of them with greediness and fierceness.

SECT. II.—GOD THE ONLY FATHER, CHRIST THE ONLY MASTER.

8. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren.

The church is the only school of truth, where Jesus Christ alone teaches it. He only is the Master—men are but his ministers or servants. It is their mouth indeed which opens, their tongue which speaks, their words which are heard; but the doctrine which they teach is his, they find it in his word, by his authority they preach it, and by his Spirit it is learned and understood. God's truth and word are an inheritance common to all the brethren. He who would seize it to his own advantage or honour, and deprive his brethren of the use of it, is a usurper of the patrimony of the church. Pastors ought to preach the word with the charity and meekness, and the faithful to hear it with the concord and unity, of brethren; for "all ye are brethren."

9. And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

The church is one family, of which God alone is the Father; from whom all the children, begotten by his word and Spirit, receive a new life. No man partakes of God's quality of Father, but only so far as he partakes of his power, authority, and charity, to breed up children for him, according to the order of nature, of civil life, and of grace.

10. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, *even* Christ.

A true Christian should hearken only to Christ in his word and ministers; an humble pastor desires to be heard, only as the disciple of this Teacher, and the servant of this Master. Jesus Christ is the sole Teacher of righteousness, foretold by the prophets; because he alone is the internal Master, who, being the word, light, and eternal truth, illuminates every created mind, and discovers all truth; and who, as Saviour

and Deliverer, speaks to the heart by his Spirit, and teaches it the truth by causing it to love it.

11. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Humility preserves the graces we have received; charity makes them subservient to the good of our neighbour. All conditions in the world are not equal; and even in the sacred ministry there are different degrees; but humility either renders all equal in God's sight, or places below others those who were above them. When a man possesses greatness only to enjoy it himself, and to place his felicity therein, he possesses it as a heathen. When he receives it with confusion, and a sense of his own unworthiness, and looks on it as a means of serving others, he then possesses it as a Christian. All advancement is dangerous; because nothing is so necessary, and yet so rare and uncommon a thing, as humility.

12. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Humility is the certain way to substantial greatness; abasement, the unavoidable punishment of pride. According to the preceding words, a man exalts himself, and deserves to be abased, when, being in a high station, he neglects to abase himself by a true humility of heart, and to make his greatness serviceable to his neighbour, according to God's design; how much more then does he exalt himself, and deserve to be abased, when he ambitiously seeks honours, and endeavours to raise himself to the highest preferments! Here is matter sufficient in this place to comfort those who are humbled, either by their own virtue, or by the pride of others; but there is likewise enough to make everybody tremble; humility being so strange and unsupportable a thing to those who are in the highest, and so difficult even to those who are in the lowest condition.

SECT. III.—HYPOCRITICAL TEACHERS.

13. ¶ But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

As Jesus Christ has delivered eight beatitudes, so he pro-

nounces here as many woes against hypocrites. Having now no manner of reason to treat these men gently, to whom, as persons abandoned to their own blindness, he designs to speak no more, he here discovers their envy and hypocrisy, that he may hinder them from being hurtful to others. Strange corruption! that men, obliged by their state and profession to promote the knowledge and love of Christ, should do the quite contrary, by decrying those who are employed in his work, and amusing souls with unprofitable and superstitious practices. It is a great sin in any Christian whatever, out of envy, thus to oppose the salvation of souls, and the designs of God concerning them; but it is one of the greatest causes of malediction on envious and hypocritical ministers. If it be a great misfortune, not to enter into the kingdom of heaven; it is the greatest of all, to hinder others also from entering. They hinder others from entering, who decry good men who might serve as guides; who dispense with the exercises of repentance, which is the gate; and weaken the rules of the gospel, which is the way thither.

14. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Avarice and hypocrisy very seldom go apart in ecclesiastical persons. When their heart is once corrupted by them, the more wealth they heap together, the greater treasure of wrath they lay up for themselves. Will widows never learn to mistrust hypocrites? Give to hospitals, to prisons, to those who are ashamed to ask, and above all to poor relations: this is the way to avoid the snares of such as are only pretenders to devotion, but who are really devoted to nothing but their own interest.

15. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

Vanity and false zeal often cover themselves under the pretence of God's glory. We must carefully endeavour to discern those who seek their own; but we must not judge of them without evidence, or without utility. One single soul,

redeemed by Christ, well deserves the utmost pains of the most considerable ministers of the church. Endeavours of this nature are sometimes the sacrifice of a perfect charity, sometimes the effort of a complete hypocrisy. It is a matter of the last importance, to take care not to put any confidence in a seducer, whose maxims and example can serve only to corrupt the heart the more. The false maxims, prejudices, and calumnies of some spiritual directors, do generally pass into their disciples, and take deeper root in their minds; which renders them more blamable, instead of excusing them.

16. Woe unto you, *ye* blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

The covetous man always gives the preference to the object of his lust; gold has still the first place in his heart. That person's zeal is more than to be suspected, who recommends those good works most from which he receives most advantage. A man ought to take great care to purify his intention, and to secure himself from the least suspicion of acting by motives of interest, when he solicits offerings, foundations, gifts to the church, etc., which he must not do, but when there is a necessity for them.

17. *Ye* fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

Jesus Christ gives covetous ecclesiastics particularly, the names of fools and blind, because it is the most apparent blindness of mind, and the most deplorable corruption of heart, to make religion subservient to avarice, to value that most in it which it teaches them most to despise, and to form all their notions of it according to their own irregular desires. In all true religion, the temple is the fountain of the sanctity which is therein: in the Jewish, the temple where God was present; in the Christian, Jesus Christ the true temple, wherein the fulness of the Godhead dwells, from whence every thing which is offered to God, and even the heart which offers it, receives its sanctification; in the religion of heaven, "the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, who are the temple" of glory, and the source of consummate holiness. (Rev. xxi. 22.)

18. And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

A blind casuist is guilty of four sins: The first consists in authorizing irreligious oaths, and dissembling the abuse of them. The second, in turning both to his own advantage. The third, in dispensing with an obligation of divine right. And the fourth, in overturning the order of religion and the duties of it, and confounding the notions thereof. A casuist ought to be entirely free from worldly interest, thoroughly instructed in religion, and extremely cautious how he invades the least of God's rights; without these qualifications he ruins all.

19. *Ye* fools and blind: for whether *is* greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

Every victim is sanctified by the altar. The person of the Word, to whom the holy humanity of Christ was united, is as it were a divine altar, which not only sanctifies the victim, but also renders it divine and adorable. It is the business of faith to discover in this general maxim the foundation of the church's religion and worship, which consists in adoring God by Jesus Christ. Nothing is worthy of God but what is sanctified by this altar; nothing should be offered to him which has not been purified, elevated, and consecrated, by its union with Christ. It is by the faith and charity of the heart which makes the offering, that this union is made,—this is that which we must always endeavour to establish and perfect in souls.

20. Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. 21. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. 22. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

We must be careful, not to swear even by the creatures. They are more or less holy, in proportion to the relation which they have to God; and the oath is so much the more criminal, as it more profanes the holiness of which they partake. Would to God we could never look on the creatures, without considering their relation to the Creator, how much of his perfections he communicates to them, how he is present

in them, the use which he would make of them, and which he would have us make for his service, and the circumspection and regard with which we ought to do it.

SECT. IV.—THE GNAT AND CAMEL.—OUTSIDE OF THE CUP.—WHITED SEPULCHRES.

23. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

To be exact in little external things, and to omit such as are essential to religion and piety, what is this but to deceive ourselves? The devil has more than one sort of snares. He has some for the licentious; and some also for the devout. Unhappy is that man who rests secure in a vain and conceited exactness about the niceties of devotion, instead of applying himself to his proper duties, to the reformation of his heart, and to the faithful observation of justice and charity toward his neighbour, and of whatever faith and religion require toward God,—this is a kind of delusion more dangerous to some souls than an open temptation to sin.

24. *Ye* blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

See here the false tenderness of conscience, which serves only to nourish pride and vanity, and to deceive the sinner by an appearance of good. One man is extremely concerned at the omission of a prayer, or of some arbitrary practice, which he has imposed on himself, who takes no care to correct his vicious habits of anger, evil-speaking, lying, slandering, luxury, immodesty, and the like. Another would not take from his neighbour the value of a gnat or fly, who robs the poor of a sum or heap as big as a camel, by his covetousness, vain expenses, ill use of ecclesiastical revenues, etc.

25. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

The heart is the seat of virtue and vice; it is by the heart that we please or displease God. In vain do men hinder their corruption from appearing outwardly, that they may not

lose the esteem of men, if their heart be corrupt in the sight of God, through the love of sin and through criminal desires. A true penitent acts quite contrary; he uses his utmost endeavours to cleanse his heart by the love of God, and the hatred of sin; and is willing to bear the shame and confusion of his misery before men.

26. *Thou* blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

External purity proceeds only from the internal; from within it diffuses itself without. He who seeks the applause of the world, is but little concerned about his inward part. It is a blindness, which is very common, for men to think that they have fulfilled the commandments of God when they have performed the outward part. Obedience to the law must flow from the fountain-head, which is charity. When the love of God is its inward principle, and his glory its end, then the outside is clean; but without this, it is nothing but hypocrisy and false righteousness.

27. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness.

How many Christians are there in name and in appearance; how few in spirit and in truth! A great many have not the virtues which they seem to have; and have even the contrary vices. There is nothing of greater importance, than to examine and know ourselves thoroughly in this regard; since it is concerning this that we shall be examined and judged at the tribunal of God. When this whiteness, with which the wall is at present covered, shall be taken off, and the naked heart appear as it is, my God! of what use will it then be to have deceived men by concealing its rottenness, but only to overwhelm it with greater confusion and a more terrible judgment!

28. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

God leaves the outward appearance to men; the heart he reserves to himself. This is the temple in which he will be served and adored, and the seat of Christian piety. Dreadful

is the judgment, and miserable the condition, when men are abandoned to this passion of desiring to hide the filthiness of a corrupt heart under the veil of a false righteousness; there being nothing more apt to increase pride, and to render it incurable. If the best of men find so much difficulty in weaning themselves from the vain desire of the esteem of the world, how shall a hypocrite ever recover from it, whose whole application and only study it is to attract and secure it!

29. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30. And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

The Pharisees thought themselves very far from the injustice and cruelty of those who had killed the prophets; and yet were themselves at the same time contriving the death of Christ. Let men condemn the conduct of the wicked ever so much with their mouth; if they imitate it, they approve it. They who praise the saints, and yet persecute those who resemble them, arraign themselves. Men are ready enough to extol the righteous of former ages, and to blame their persecutors,—there being now nothing to fear or hope from those who are dead. But for the sake of a very small interest, they will, without any scruple, join with the world against good men of the present age. Grant, Lord, that our opinions and conduct may be directed by thy word and interests, and not by the corruption of our own heart, or by the spirit of the world!

SECT. V.—THE MEASURE OF INIQUITY.—JERUSALEM A MURDERING CITY.

32. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33. *Ye* serpents, *ye* generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

God cannot either commend or approve of sin, because he is infinitely good; but he can abandon and give up the sinner to his wickedness, because he is infinitely just. Miserable is the state of him who has filled up the measure of his crimes. To be deaf to the truth, to oppose it out of interest, envy,

and jealousy, and to persecute those who preach it, are generally the last sins. There is a certain measure of grace and mercy, after which God leaves his justice to take its course: this measure is known only to him. When a man is about to commit any sin, he ought to fear that that very sin will be the last to fill up the measure; but after the commission of it, he should hope that it is not, and repent of it. This is the only means to escape the damnation of hell; but how rare is the grace of repentance after a pharisaical life, such as our blessed Saviour has here represented it!

34. ¶ Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city:

The gifts of God in his saints serve only to increase the damnation of those who are left to their own blindness and wickedness. It is an instance of the favour and blessing of God on an age and country, when he bestows on it some eminent saints, some pastors full of zeal, wisdom, and knowledge; but wo to those who, by persecuting these saints and pastors, change this favour and blessing into judgment and malediction! All private persons contribute to this misfortune by their sins, and therefore they ought all to avert it by their repentance.

35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

The resemblance which the crimes of children bear to those of their fathers, draws upon them the same punishments. There is, in the life of a wicked man, a chain of sins linked one to another, from the beginning to the end of it, which altogether cause his reprobation; so in proportion in a nation, in a community, and particularly in the body of the Jews. Abel, the first righteous man, slain by his brother out of envy, and Zacharias the priest, stoned on the account of his zeal in speaking the truth, are two figures of Jesus Christ, and of the causes of his death.

36. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

So terrible is the justice of God, that when he punishes a

sinner, he seems to punish all sins in him. God in mercy foretells his judgments, confirms the prediction by a kind of oath, represents the rigour, and points out the time of them; but the sinner's obduracy turns this mercy into a new treasure of wrath.

37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!

Unbelieving Jerusalem is an emblem of the sinner. How great must the tenderness of Christ for his elect be, since he shows so much for these obdurate hearts! God earnestly desires the sinner's repentance, since he causes it to be preached to him by so many persons, and in so many different manners; but the sinner will not hear. Wretched will! of which man is so fond and jealous; and which yet, by reason of its corruption, is good for nothing but to resist and oppose the will of God! But thou, Lord, canst overcome the resistance whenever thou pleasest. Thou givest way to it when thy justice requires it; thou subduest it when thy mercy inclines thee thereto.

38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 39. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

The Jewish people, left to the justice of God, even to the end of the world, are a dreadful instance of the punishment of sin. When men seek to avoid the loss of worldly goods by forsaking God, they are themselves forsaken by him; and his justice often takes away that which they endeavoured to secure at the expense of their fidelity. In what a sad condition is a heart, when God withdraws himself from it, when his hand leaves it to itself, when the eyes of its faith are closed, and it sees neither Christ, nor his truth, nor its own duty! O Jesus, let not this miserable heart be mine! Let it never lose sight of thee! Let thy light continually shine upon it!

CHAPTER XXIV.

SECT. I.—DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE.—DECEIVERS.—WARS.—FAMINE.

1. And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to *him* for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

Jesus Christ, by going now the last time out of the temple, denotes the reprobation of the Jews. He bears with the curiosity of his disciples, to teach us how to make that of our friends subservient to their instruction and edification. It is a very extraordinary talent, to know how to improve every unprofitable part of conversation to the advantage of religion, by taking occasion from thence still to mention something which is edifying, and to sow the seed of some beneficial truth.

2. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

This temple was destroyed, justly, on the account of the sins of the Jews; mercifully, to take away from them the occasion of continuing in Judaism; and mysteriously, to show that the ancient sacrifices were abolished, and that the Jewish worship was ceased. If God spared not his own temple, what will become of those profane edifices built and cemented with the blood of the poor? Happy that person who labours only to erect an eternal building!

3. ¶ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Human curiosity makes a great progress in a little time. This of the apostles is commendable, because they only pursue the intimation given them by Christ, and make him the only subject of their inquiry. There are three different comings of Jesus Christ, which serve mutually to make known and illustrate one another. One in anger, to punish the Jews, and to put an end to the reign of the law. Another in mercy,

to form his church, and to begin the reign of the gospel and of grace. The third in glory, to judge the world, and to consummate the kingdom of God in his saints, and that of his justice in hell. Abundance of people are curious to know the time "of the end of the world;" but very few endeavour to prepare themselves for the end of their own life.

4. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

The world is full of deceivers, (2 John 7.) This is a temptation belonging to all times, and to which the three comings of Christ are subject. The deceit which is covered with the mask of piety, is more to be feared by those who seek God than by others. False Christs to the Jews, false apostles to the first Christians, and false reformers in the last ages. False pastors, false directors of the conscience, and pretenders to the Spirit in all times. It is not without cause that Christ gives us this caution,—as we must not neglect it, so we must not abuse it.

5. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

In this and the following verses, Christ points out unto us several means and occasions of being seduced. The first means proceed from false Christs. The delivering the Jews up to them was a just punishment for their having rejected the true during his life, for their having ascribed his miracles to the illusion of the devil, and treated him as a deceiver after his death. How dangerous is it not to profit by the cares of a good pastor! God oftentimes, by way of judgment, takes such a one away, and permits a hireling to come in his place. Men lose the opportunity of a wise, exact, and experienced guide, and fall into the hands of a deceiver. To avoid this first seducement, we must watch, pray, and carefully examine.

6. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

The second occasion of being seduced is, when the sight of the disorders and confusions, which seem to denote the end of

the world, causes men to despair of seeing the divine promises fulfilled. Let us not be troubled, whatever happens; God will accomplish his own work, and be faithful to his promises. What means is there for men to avoid being troubled at a scourge so terrible as that of war, except by continuing always intent on God, his promises, and his law, and endeavouring to appease his wrath by a serious conversion? "Wars and rumours of wars," as to the generality of mankind, serve only to excite the trouble and disorder of their passions, their ambition, revenge, hope, curiosity, avarice, and desire of new events. The true Christian adores God; bewails both those sins which are the causes, and those which are the effects of war; beholds with a holy dread the justice of God, executed by the rage of men; laments the loss of so great a number of souls; casts his eyes on God's eternal vengeance, of which this is only the shadow; and beseeches him to make all these things subservient to his glory, and to his designs concerning the elect.

7. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. 8. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows.

The third means of being seduced, is the attributing that to man which comes from God. Thus the heathens ascribed all the misfortunes of the empire, and all the plagues which God inflicted, to the contempt which the Christians showed toward their idols; whereas these evils were only the punishment of the wicked, and the trial of the good. Men generally turn every thing to the disadvantage of piety. If a man, from the time of devoting himself to God, suffer in his estate, his health, or otherwise, it is, say they, because he is imprudent in his conduct, indiscreet in his mortifications, excessive in his devotions, etc. Revolts, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and all the other evils of this life, are emblems of those of the other, which they warn us to prevent by repentance; and of the vices and disorders of our hearts, which they solicit us to correct.

SECT. II.—THE RIGHTEOUS PERSECUTED.—FALSE PROPHETS.—CHARITY GROWN COLD.—PERSEVERANCE.

9. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

The fourth occasion of being seduced is, the public and general hatred, and the persecution of the world. Can a religion, said they, which is abhorred by all the world, be the true? Can a handful of men, pursued with fire and sword by all the powers of the earth, and despised by the wisest philosophers—can such as these be the favourites of God? How often does it happen, that good men are persecuted as criminals, merely on the account of this fourth means of seducement? To be hated of all the world is nothing, provided one is beloved of God.

10. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

The fifth occasion of being seduced, proceeds from the scandals or offences given by those of the household of faith, their divisions, and the treacheries of false brethren. Nothing is more serviceable to the devil, in seducing the weak and simple. We must still adhere to God, by and for himself; and not forsake him, though we should be left alone. Good example is a great help in piety, but it is not the foundation of it. Our being mingled with the wicked is somewhat inconvenient and troublesome; but it is necessary to exercise our virtue, and to put us in mind of human infirmity.

11. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

The sixth means of being seduced, arises from false prophets, mercenary pastors, and teachers of error. All those who advance such doctrines of religion or morality as are contrary to the gospel, are of this number; and this number is great in all ages. Had Jesus Christ foretold the fall but of two or three persons, ought we not to have feared lest we should be of the number? He has foretold the fall of many, and we tremble not. Let us keep ourselves closely united to

God by faith, and believe that this gift proceeds from his pure goodness alone.

12. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

The last occasion of being seduced is, the observing how charity grows cold; which still decays in proportion to the increase of concupiscence. It is a grace which is very uncommon, for a man to hold out against the iniquity of the age, and to secure his virtue from being at all weakened thereby. One of the most subtle and dangerous seducements of all, is the example of some person of great reputation for piety, who, through fear of men, grows faint and cool in the cause of truth. Such a one often draws many after him, either by the weight of his authority, or perhaps because he is the more earnest to make his weakness pass for a virtue, to maintain and justify it, and to procure as many imitators of it as he can.

13. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

God alone gives perseverance, no man merits it. Can any one who knows his own weakness, and considers all the seducements and temptations of life, trust at all to himself? We are so much the less secure of receiving this gift, the more confident we are of it; and we have so much the more reason to hope for it, the more unworthy we think ourselves thereof. It belongs to him who has begun the work of salvation, to finish and complete it in us. But in order to this, it belongs to us to fear, to pray, to humble ourselves, and to labour.

14. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations: and then shall the end come.

The destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple was deferred, till the gospel had been preached everywhere; to the end, that the Jews might see the completion of the prophecies in the vocation of all the Gentiles; that all the Jews dispersed abroad might be called, before the execution of the divine vengeance; and that the church, even from its infancy, might have a kind of universality, and be visible to all the earth,

before the shadow of the synagogue disappeared. But how many Jews were there then, how many Christians are there in all ages, to whom the knowledge of the gospel served, and still serves, only to their condemnation!

SECT. III.—THE ABOMINATION IN THE HOLY PLACE.—FLIGHT.—GREAT TRIBULATION.

15. When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand,)

We are not at all troubled at the dreadful signs of the desolation of Jerusalem, because all that is past. We are little concerned at the desolation of the church by Antichrist, because this seems at a great distance. But how come we not to fear the desolation of the soul by sin, of which we have so many present examples, the principle of which we carry within us, and the abomination of which all the prophets and all the Scriptures so plainly represent unto us! The profanation of holy things is a terrible mark of God's displeasure. We are affected only with such as are external and extraordinary; but the frequent abuse of the sacraments, especially unworthy communions, the sacred ministry in the hands of wicked men, the contempt of the divine word, and the sins of ecclesiastical persons, ought much more to make us sigh, and dread the last effects of the wrath of God, and even the extinction of religion itself in a country.

16. Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains:

To quit all in order to save our souls, is a counsel proper for all times, but which on some occasions may become a necessary duty. The world is judged, and is about to be given up to the divine Justice, and yet we still cleave to it! There is not one person to be found, but who, for fear of God's judgments, ought to flee into the mountains, either by retirement, or by a life of prayer, or by separating himself from the company of sinners, or by renouncing the conversation, maxims, and impertinences of the world, or even by forsaking his best friends, if they have forsaken God. When

retreat is necessary to a man's salvation, he must not barely retire, but fly.

17. Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: 18. Neither let them which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

Unhappy is that man who loads himself with earthly cares and riches, when he should think of nothing but how to escape the divine wrath by forsaking all! He who desires to save all, hazards all. Let us leave that to perish which must do so; let us save that which is eternal. Death surprises almost all mankind in some particular engagement; the carnal after one manner, the spiritual after another. The body is an earthly house; when a life of faith or mortification has once raised us above it, our salvation is secured by our not descending or coming down. The body is a garment; he who has once laid aside his affection toward it, in order to work out his salvation, must by no means take it again.

19. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

Happy is that man, whom the consequences of marriage, and the encumbrances of a family, hinder not from saving his soul by flying from the world! Men are generally big with desires and designs as to the world, and filled with the love of it, when they are forced to leave it. How advantageous is it to disengage and free ourselves from them betimes! A soft and effeminate soul is fond of the body, and entirely employed about it, as a nurse about her child, to gratify its desires, to please it in every thing, and breed it up in an animal and carnal way of life. How terrible to these effeminate spirits is the bare name of death! yet it is not the less unavoidable.

20. But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

We must fly from sin and the wrath of God while we can. It is a fatal imprudence to wait till some great occasion present itself, ere we think of making any provision of virtue; and to delay the work of our salvation, till we are unable to perform any thing; and our flight from the obstacles of it,

till the winter of a languishing, inactive, and infirm old age. It is chiefly by means of prayer that the Christian furnishes himself with provisions, that he proposes himself to depart, and that he converts the barrenness and coldness of his heart into an abundance of charity, and his inability to work into the strength and vigour of grace.

21. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

Every thing is disposed and ordered in favour of the elect. The destruction of Jerusalem was hastened, to prevent those among the Jews from falling under such temptations as were above their strength; and the reign of Antichrist will be shortened, for the sake of those who shall live in the last times. How suitable to the goodness of God is this care of his elect! How happy is it to be his! Let us adore and love him; and let us, by our prayers and fidelity, draw down upon ourselves this love, vigilance, and care of God, so conspicuous in proportioning the temptation to the strength of the elect, or in taking them away even from the temptation itself.

SECT. IV.—FALSE CHRISTS.—THE ELECT ALMOST DECEIVED.—THE EAGLES GATHERED TOGETHER.

23. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here *is* Christ, or there; believe *it* not.

There is but one Christ or Saviour, to whom alone we must steadfastly adhere. The way of faith, as well as that of virtue, is a single and narrow way; let us take great care not to leave it, to seek new paths. When we have once been ascertained of the mission of our blessed Saviour, by the completion of prophecies, and the seal of miracles, all that which comes afterward is but temptation and illusion.

24. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

No miracle, how astonishing soever it may appear, should induce us to change our faith; there is but one Mediator, one

gospel, one church, and one faith. The devil himself knows, that an extraordinary mission without miracles deserves not to be regarded or examined, since he endeavours to support seducers by the shadow of this sort of evidence. Prophecy and miracles are two proofs which strengthen and confirm each other; prophecies foretell miracles, and miracles show the accomplishment of prophecies. False proofs compared with those of Christ, make the truth of the latter more evident and illustrious. Since the elect belong to God, and are peculiarly his who has undertaken to save them, there is not the least occasion to fear that even one of them shall be lost. No man is certain that he is of this number; but every one ought with confidence to think so, and to confirm that confidence by a good life and conversation.

25. Behold, I have told you before. 26. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, *he is* in the secret chambers; believe *it* not.

Every secret and strange doctrine, unknown to the apostles and holy fathers, is false and pernicious. Let us have no manner of curiosity for these new discoveries. It is not the good grain, but the chaff, which is carried about with every wind of doctrine. There are but too many Christians who seek here and there for such remedies in their miseries as God has not promised them; and neglect to have recourse to Jesus Christ, the sole Deliverer from all our miseries, whom all the Scriptures point out to us. Blind and miserable is every one who hopes to mend his condition by forsaking Christ! It is to him we must apply ourselves; it is he whom God has given us; whatever turns us aside from him is fatal to us.

27. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

The faith received everywhere in so short a time, not only without any human assistance, but also notwithstanding the greatest opposition from all the powers of the earth, was, as it were, a lightning which shone from east to west, and a miracle from heaven, to confound the incredulity of the sages of the world. The last coming of Christ will be yet more surprising.

28. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

True Christians are spiritual eagles, raised by faith above all things here below, and soaring still with ardour toward Jesus Christ. Wherever his mystical body the church, or (the representation of) his natural body in the eucharist, is found, there the elect are gathered together, as so many eagles to their prey. As soon as Christ shall appear at his second coming, with the scars of his wounds, and the standard of his cross, which will renew the memory of his death; then all men, become, as it were, eagles by the resurrection, shall rise in the air to meet him; and gather about this carcass, or dead body, as the Greek expresses it, which, being the victim of God, was sacrificed on the cross; there to receive the sentence of their eternal portion. Let us earnestly endeavour to be of the number of those blessed eagles who shall present themselves with confidence before Jesus Christ, and be united to his immortal body to all eternity.

SECT. V.—THE SUN DARKENED.—THE COMING OF CHRIST.

29. ¶ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

The Jewish church ends in the persecution which fell on the Jews; the Christian church is established by the persecutions of the Gentiles. In times of trial, when the sun of faith seems to be darkened, and the church not to give her light, when many of her doctors fall, and her pillars are shaken, then even her greatest lights and strongest supports have sufficient reason to be afraid. Christian prudence consists in humbling ourselves, and being prepared for all events.

30. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

The sign of the true Jonas is the glory of his resurrection; and the faith of this resurrection, received by Jews as well as Gentiles, is the triumph of his cross, the establishment of his heavenly kingdom, and the fulness of the body of Christ.

Happy they who, in these last times, shall, with a true contrition of heart, mourn and bewail the misery of their sins! Unhappy they who, by a grief arising from sensual desire, shall lament only their temporal evils and misfortunes. O cross of Christ, exposed then again to be the subject of contradiction! Savour of life, savour of death; salvation to some, perdition to others; the comfort of the elect, the confusion of the reprobate!

31. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

O lovely and desirable assembly of the elect, august senate, college truly sacred, why art not thou the sole object of human ambition! No man shall have any place therein who has not been a member of the true church, which alone is spread over the four parts of the world. To this church the visible angels call us with the trumpet of God's word; whoever obeys not this call, shall never be called by the invisible angels to the church of the elect. How sweet and comfortable is it to a Christian, separated from his brethren, banished to the remotest parts of the earth, and treated as excommunicate for the cause of Christ, to think of this reunion, so much to be desired, and which shall never have an end.

32. Now learn the parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh: 33. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even* at the doors.

The belief of the coming of Jesus Christ is the consolation of the righteous. Let us not wait for the last trumpet, ere we prepare ourselves for judgment. The sound of it in the gospel is even now heard by all those who have the ears of the heart. Whoever has not these stopped by the amusements of this life, and is not stunned by the noise of his passions, thinks that he is continually called upon by it. Let our faith incessantly say to us, The Son of man is near, even at the doors. Let the voice of thy grace, O Lord, repeat this to me both frequently and effectually!

34. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these

things be fulfilled. 35. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

The hope of the righteous is founded upon the stability of the divine word; which is therefore their chief delight. Whatever difficulties our understanding may find in that which God has either foretold or promised, there is not the least reason to doubt concerning it; to engage our belief, it is sufficient that he has said it. One person readily believes another on his bare word, who yet will not believe the word of God; so great is the corruption of the mind of man.

SECT. VI.—THE LAST DAY UNFORESEEN.

36. ¶ But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Our ignorance of the last day ought to make us vigilant every moment of our life. God has not discovered to us the time wherein he intends to judge us, to the end that we may always keep ourselves in a readiness to be judged. A foolish desire of knowing that which is to come, renders abundance of persons incredulous as to this oracle of the Son of God; and credulous, even to superstition, in respect of the vain predictions of men concerning the end of their lives, or of the world. They neglect a beneficial and useful kind of uncertainty, to rely on a false and deceitful appearance of certainty.

37. But as the days of Noah *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

There are two deluges: the first of water, the second of fire, to purge the world of iniquity, to save the elect, and to punish the wicked. Christ here instructs us how to inform ourselves of what is to come, not by a vain observation of the stars, but by a holy meditation on the Scriptures; not in order to discover in them what he designed to conceal from us, but to prepare ourselves to do his will, in pursuing the discoveries which he himself vouchsafes to make, and in contemplating the mysteries to come, in those representations which his Spirit has given of them in what is past.

38. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah

entered into the ark, 39. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

The generality of mankind, through the enchantment of the cares of this life, are surprised by death and judgment. They are not always gross and heinous sins which throw men into a forgetfulness of God and his judgments, and into a contempt of his law; sometimes an irregular application to the common employments and affairs of life insensibly extinguishes our faith. Every one has his own proper way to attain salvation; and every one who misses of it, does it by corrupting his way after his own manner. The surprise which is here threatened proceeds not from God's design, but from the sinner's negligence, and his abuse of the long patience and forbearance of God. A man is never in danger of being surprised when his heart is devoted to God, when his faith is pure, his hope lively, his charity fervent and sincere, and his life full of good works.

SECT. VII.—THE ONE TAKEN, THE OTHER LEFT.—WE MUST WATCH CONTINUALLY.

40. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 41. Two *women shall be* grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Terrible but adorable choice! Men have still something to fear, even in the most innocent employments, and in the exercise of such arts as are necessary to life. In this state, indeed, they are not so subject to extravagant desires; but then they are often very ignorant of their duty, and forget to direct all their labour to God's glory, to look on it as a means of salvation, and to make it an exercise of repentance. Neither the church in this life, nor any state or condition in the church, can pretend to consist altogether of elect. There is a mixture in every state; and therefore, in every one there is occasion for fear as well as hope.

42. ¶ Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

The vigilance necessary to prepare us for death and judgment is not a supine and inactive vigilance, but such as is

employed in examination of our faults, in attention to our duty, in application to good works, to prayer, repentance, etc.

43. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 44. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

It is much for our advantage to be obliged to be always in uncertainty, always in expectation of our Master, to the end that we may be always on our guard against sin and sloth. The heart is then ready, when it is in order; and it is never so, but when God is master of it, when nothing but his love reigns therein, and when this love regulates that of our neighbour, and the use of all other creatures. How great is the folly, to be more careful and vigilant on the account of a small temporal advantage, than of the eternal salvation of the soul!

SECT. VIII.—THE WISE SERVANT.—THE EVIL SERVANT.

45. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

It is not the work, but the fidelity, which God rewards in his servants. We must all live in the same expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ which a servant has with respect to his master; but this expectation must be more vigilant in the ministers of Christ than in the rest of the faithful. Here is an abstract of their duties: (1.) Such a person must be called and appointed, not by himself, but by the vocation and lawful mission of his Lord. (2.) He must look on himself, not as the master of the family, but really as a servant. (3.) He must be exactly faithful in his ministry, and in observing his Master's commands, at the expense of all. (4.) His fidelity must be wise, prudent, well-informed: faithful and wise, this comprehends all. (5.) He must make it his chief care to give the household their meat; not out of his own stock, but distributing what he has received. (6.) He must do it in due season; and it is always a proper season to instruct and serve souls, because their needs are always present; the time of many of them may expire every hour; and for want of improving a moment, eternity is sometimes lost.

46. Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

This blessedness consists not barely in working, but in working according to the law and will of God. We must then work continually in the ministry, since our Master should find us so doing; and he may come every moment. The exactness which is used in serving earthly princes in their own way is scarcely to be conceived. Does not God deserve at least as much? A servant thinks himself happy when his services are grateful to his master. Oh, what happiness attends us, if we please the best and most powerful of Masters!

47. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

He who is not satisfied with the reward which God promises him, knows not what it is to be made ruler over all his goods. His goods are himself; and nothing less is promised us, if we continue faithful to him. The ministers of the Lord have in heaven a reward proportioned to their labours and their character, and shall there partake of his authority over souls. Let us not refuse to give ourselves to God, who will freely give himself to us.

48. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; 49. And shall begin to smite *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;

Here are three characters of a bad prelate: the first is, to have little faith as to the judgments of God, or the coming of Christ. Does a man believe there is another life, when he either undertakes of his own accord to be accountable for souls, by taking on himself the pastoral office, or trembles not at the thoughts of this account? The second is, to govern with an absolute dominion, to oppress his colleagues, and to exercise violence over his inferiors and on the weak. The third, to lead an irregular life, and to converse chiefly with the imitators of his passions. Lord, abandon not thy flock to such wolves; but send it pastors according to thy own heart.

50. The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of, 51. And shall cut him

asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Here are three punishments which answer to the three characters of the evil servant: the first is, a sudden death, and the weight of God's wrath falling upon him, without a moment's time to avert it: this answers to his infidelity and his forgetfulness of the divine judgments. The second is, a general and eternal separation from the society of the church, from the communion of saints, and from all those gifts which he has abused: and this is answerable to the abuse of his authority in the church. The third consists in tears and eternal pains: which answer to his voluptuous life; as the company of hypocritical pastors, who under an angelical office concealed a diabolical life, does to his criminal acquaintance and conversation. Every wicked Christian, every man who does not worship and serve God according to his law, is this evil servant, who shall be judged according to his sins against that faith and religion which are due to God, according to his injustice and violence against his neighbour, and according to the corruption of his heart and the irregularities of his life. My God! how dear will the sinner pay for the pleasures of a moment, and the transient satisfactions of sin!

CHAPTER XXV.

SECT. I.—THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

1. Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

Every Christian, by his faith and baptism, makes profession of aspiring to the marriage of the Lamb. His virginity consists in worshipping one God, and in loving none but him. His life is but one continual preparation for the marriage-supper of eternity. His heart is his lamp. By the motions and desires of his soul, he goes forth to meet the bridegroom, and hastens toward heaven by the purity of his life.

2. And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish.

The church, before she arrives at the place where this marriage is celebrated, which is heaven, is always divided, always mixed with good and bad. It is the greatest of all follies, to make profession by baptism of our earnest desire and ambition of attaining to eternal life, and to neglect to prepare ourselves for it during the whole course of our lives. True wisdom consists in being always ready, and in living in continual expectation of the bridegroom's coming.

3. They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

Charity and its works are the oil of the heart. A heart without charity is a lamp without oil. Oh inconceivable folly of the children of Adam! to employ their whole lives in filling their hearts with every thing besides, and to forget that which alone can fill, nourish, and make them shine before God, and even enjoy God himself forever.

4. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

The greatest wisdom consists in having charity, and in performing the works of it. Life is given us to no other end but that we may make a sufficient provision of this oil. God alone can pour it into our hearts by his Spirit; and this Spirit is itself that oil of gladness with which the life of our hearts must be fed to all eternity. Jesus Christ alone has the fulness of it, and of this fulness must all his members receive, according to the measure which he has designed them. Lord, as thou hast bestowed on me a lamp, leave it not empty, but replenish it out of thy abundant fulness!

5. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

How few are there who think seriously of death and judgment, and expect the bridegroom with a persevering vigilance! The beginnings of conversion are fervent; but zeal insensibly grows cool in the generality of persons. There is need of an extraordinary grace, to enable us to continue this perfect vigilance to the end, so as not to be surprised at the hour of death. Lord, who keepest Israel—the heart, I mean, which thou hast made the Israel of God—do thou neither slumber nor sleep over me!

6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

This is a terrible voice, which calls the creatures to appear before their Creator when they think least of it. Happy they to whom he comes as an amiable and much-desired bridegroom, not as a severe and inexorable judge! Let us earnestly endeavour to render him such to us as we desire to find him.

7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

Happy is that man who is ready to appear before God at all times whatever! But more happy still is he who can with a true confidence desire the coming of Christ! There are some certain preparations which no Christian omits at the approach of death; every one then thinks of trimming his heart, which is his lamp. But how late is it to begin to think of it at that time! Grant, O Lord, that I may not be of the number of those who cannot, without regret, submit to the necessity of dying, and who neglect to prepare themselves for it until the very last hour!

8. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

My God, how dismal is it for a man not to perceive the emptiness of his heart, the want of good works, and the extinction of charity, until he comes to die! At that time there is often nothing more of the light of faith and of the love of goodness left remaining, than only just enough to show a man what he has lost, and to raise an unprofitable regret. He then sees that good men, whom he used to count foolish and miserable wretches, have only true wisdom and substantial wealth; to these he has recourse, and would fain partake of their piety and charity: but every thing fails when time fails.

9. But the wise answered, saying, *Not so;* lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

The holiness of others will not avail us at the hour of death. All the false lustre of external works, which shine only to the eyes of men, goes out and vanishes in that moment. Charity alone is never extinguished, when a man carries this oil in his lamp out of the world with him. What would we not give to buy it at the time of death, if it were to be sold? Nothing

can purchase it but worthy fruits of repentance; but, then, time and the spirit of repentance are necessary to the production of these fruits.

10. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

Sinners, on a deathbed, too often meet with those deceitful merchants who promise them the mercy of God and eternal salvation for a price which is of no value in his sight. How much better is it for them, with the assistance and ministry of the church, humbly to address themselves to Christ, who is the only author of salvation, who himself keeps the key of his treasury, which is charity, and distributes it freely without money, instead of losing their time in dealing with quacks, who promise every thing, and can perform nothing!—The door is shut! Dreadful and fatal words! No hope remains. Nothing but death shuts this door; but death may surprise us in our sins, and then despair is our portion.

11. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

We stay abundantly too late, when we stay until the hour of death, ere we begin to love God, and to think seriously of our salvation. They must be extremely deficient in the knowledge of salvation who place the foundation of it upon a will or testament charged with pious legacies, without having endeavoured to fill their hearts with the oil of mercy and charity. This is to cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," after the door is shut. Prayer is the key of heaven; but there is a proper time and manner of praying. There are prayers at the last hour of the same nature with that of the penitent thief; but there are also those of Esau and of Antiochus.

12. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

God, who is love, knows not those who have no charity. Let us diligently endeavour, while we have time, to make ourselves known to God as his children, by living in the spirit of children, which is love. He will own none who have not the resemblance of his Son; and this resemblance is to be attained no otherwise than by humility, purity, mortification, repentance, charity, and the like. Let us thoroughly con-

sider, in the presence of God, what it is never to be known by him, never to bear the least resemblance of his Son, which may render us acceptable in his sight, and beloved by him.

13. Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Can that man pretend to have any faith who does not watch, after an admonition so frequently repeated? If we would not be surprised, we must look on every hour as the last. If "to watch" be to employ ourselves chiefly about the business of our salvation, alas, how few Christians are there who watch! How many who slumber! How many asleep! How many seized with a lethargy! How many even quite dead!

SECT. II.—THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

14. ¶ For *the kingdom of heaven is* as a man travelling into a far country, *who* called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

The children of God and the ministers of Jesus Christ are called, as servants, not to manage their own affairs, but those of their Master. They have nothing which is properly their own; every thing belongs to Christ, who has received it of his Father, and recovered it out of the hands of the devil, by redeeming it with his own blood. He who uses his natural or supernatural talents as if he were the author and master of them, is a usurper of the goods which belong to God.

15. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

Duties and obligations are proportioned to the states, conditions, and talents of men. Every one, in order to be saved, must, First, Be faithful in the performance of that which God requires of him in his station. God proportions his graces, not according to natural deserts, but according to the conditions and obligations of men, and above all, according to his designs concerning souls. A person may be very inconsiderable in the eyes of men, who is designed for an exalted station in heaven. All things are measured and regulated—graces, employments, and necessities. Secondly, In order to salvation, a man must keep within his own sphere, and trade

according to his own talent, not according to that of another. It is pride and envy ambitiously to desire our neighbour's grace.

16. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made *them* other five talents.

Thirdly, A man must improve the talents he has received, by establishing and enlarging the kingdom of God, both in his own soul, and in the souls of others. There is a great difference between the figure and the truth. The servant does not receive from his master the skill and industry necessary to the improvement of his money: but the Christian, and the minister of the Lord, must receive all from him—both the talent and the good-will—both the grace and the use of it!

17. And likewise he that *had received* two, he also gained other two.

Fourthly, A man must not continue idle, under pretence of having only indifferent talents. No person can deny that he has two talents at least: that of the understanding, to know God and his own duty; and that of the will, to love him and adhere to him. To make a continual progress in the knowledge of salvation, and in the love of God and of Jesus Christ, is a great gain: but thereby to arrive at the sight of God face to face, and to enjoy him by a consummate love—this is a gain which is incomprehensible and eternal!

18. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

Fifthly, A man who designs to be saved, must not leave the smallest talents unemployed. In the conduct of the children of Adam, there is always some excess or defect, unless they are guided by the Spirit of the second Adam; either they are desirous of making their talents very conspicuous, if they are great, or they entirely suppress them, if they are small and obscure. We must do the quite contrary: employ the greatest with humility, and the least with confidence.

19. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

Sixthly, A man must work, as being to give an account of all at the judgment of God. Does that person think of this

who acts directly contrary to what he commands? And if he do not think of this, where is his belief of the judgment of God? And if he believe not this, of what religion is he? God stays a long time; but this long time cannot exceed the life of man, which is very short.

20. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

Seventhly, A man must offer to God the glory, use, and profit of his talents and labour. How scarce are those faithful servants, who take pains only for their Master, and who keep back from him no part of that glory which should arise from his graces and talents! Vanity is a thief, which robs God of that which is most precious to him—namely, his glory.

21. His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Eighthly, A man, in order to be saved, must expect no other praise than that which God himself will give his servants. Ninthly, He must aspire at no other reward but His. Tenthly, He must render himself unworthy of "the joy of his Lord," by entertaining any vain joy or human complacency. The reward which God bestows on his servants is a superabundant reward, because it is himself. Our faithfulness in observing his commands is the price of it, rather than the greatness of our labour. We sow on earth; we reap in heaven. Here a little pains and sorrow; there an inconceivable and eternal joy!

22. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

He who saves his neighbour's soul together with his own, is the person who doubles his talents. A faithful compliance with the designs of God and the duties of our vocation, is a great source of confidence. A man goes to him with joy when he has done his will; but he demands no reward. God is good and faithful; that is sufficient.

23. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou

hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

O comfortable words! but which belong not to this life. How many fears, troubles, and scruples will be forever dissipated, when He who knows our heart better than we ourselves do, shall assure us that it is a good and faithful heart, and such as is worthy of "the joy of our Lord!" The faithful servant enters into the bosom of the Father, there to enjoy the glory of the Son, and the rights of the divine adoption. The joy of their Lord enters here below into the heart of the elect; but in heaven, the elect shall themselves enter into the joy of their Lord, there to lose themselves, as it were, in endless felicity.

24. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou has not strewed:

It is very true, though the pride of man will not comprehend it, that it is an advantage to have but one common and useful talent. The lustre of great talents dazzles, exalts, and intoxicates. Variety distracts, and often causes men to take the wrong. The having but one, and that an obscure one, unites our whole application, and secures us from vanity. The sinner, that he may lay his sin on God, spares neither calumny nor blasphemy. How far does the blindness and ingratitude of the sinner extend, to accuse God of cruelty, self-interest, and injustice, who requires nothing of us but what is for our advantage, who freely pardons our evil actions, and even rewards the good which he himself works in us!

25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, *there* thou hast *that is* thine.

Laziness often covers itself with the veil of the fear of God. That man takes little care of his salvation, who, without any lawful reason, withdraws himself from labour, only out of apprehension of God's judgment, and endeavours not to advance his glory, and his neighbour's salvation, when he has a talent for it. This is of itself a piece of theft and injustice; but for him to pretend to have discharged his duty, by doing neither good nor evil, is to add falsehood and insolence to his in-

justice. When a man is obliged to do good, not to do it is to do evil.

26. His lord answered and said unto him, *Thou* wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed: 27. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and *then* at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

The more a man endeavours to excuse himself before God, the more he condemns himself. There is a filial fear; and one which is servile, mercenary, idle, and slothful. The unfaithful servant hides this last under a false prudence, and justifies it by a very weak argument. The true wisdom of the good and faithful servant consists in performing readily his Master's will, without arguing concerning it. It is only the wicked and slothful servant who disputes so much, and does nothing. This is the first punishment of the unprofitable servant; convicted of wickedness and slothfulness out of his own mouth, he bears the shame and confusion thereof before all.

28. Take therefore the talent from him, and give *it* unto him which hath ten talents. 29. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

The second punishment of the unprofitable servant is, the being deprived of every thing which he had received. The third is, the seeing others already rich in good works, still more enriched by that which was his, which is no small vexation to him. The fourth is, to find himself incapable any longer of hiding his slothfulness under the appearance of piety. How advantageous is it to be employed in God's service! a man never is at any loss, and always gains beyond his hopes. To hazard all for God, is to secure and improve all. At his tribunal there is a kind of confiscation of graces. Those of wicked and slothful servants are applied to the advantage of the good and faithful, as well as all their own labour.

30. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

To be excluded from heaven, to be cast headlong into hell, and abandoned to rage and despair to all eternity! O God,

can any man think on it without horror! And yet this is the inevitable punishment of every impenitent sinner. The love of rest and ease makes men slothful and unprofitable; and it is merely by this that they lose the very thing which they have loved in a wrong manner, and at a wrong time. There is but one paradise. He who is resolved to have his here below, can hope for none in heaven. There are two sorts of unprofitable servants: (1.) Some, who consume the patrimony of the church, without doing her any service. (2.) Others, who, through the love of ease and disgust of spiritual things, do nothing toward their salvation, and mind only the enjoyments of this present life.

SECT. III.—THE LAST JUDGMENT.

31. ¶ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32. And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats:

In vain does the sinner endeavour to avoid the presence of his God; he will be forced one day to appear before his tribunal. See here a spectacle very different from that of the cross, where the Son of God, naked and disfigured, forsaken by his disciples, encompassed with his enemies, and seated between two thieves on the throne of his humiliations and ignominies, did in those two exhibit an emblem of the separation here described. What an object is this to exercise our faith! What a large field of reflection and meditation is here before us—to consider Jesus Christ as a God in his majesty, as a King upon his throne, as a Judge on his tribunal, and as a Shepherd amid his flock, wherein the goats continue mixed with the sheep even to the last day!

33. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

The last function of the Prince of pastors to be performed on earth is, to make this dreadful separation of mankind for eternity. Let us strive to be of the number of the sheep, by our meekness, humility, tractableness, and innocency of life. Such as we are at our leaving this world, such shall we be

forever; either sheep, to drink at the very fountain of eternal truth; or goats, to become the prey of devils. Oh pure and spotless church, society of elect alone, immortal body composed of none but living members! in vain do we seek for thee on earth; it is only in the land of the living, and after this great division and separation, that we shall find thee with and in God, living to him and by him to all eternity.

34. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit* the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: [*Fr.* possess.]

If there have been kings who have given away kingdoms, they were only foreign kingdoms which they could not keep; none but God gives his own out of pure bounty; and this kingdom is himself. God blesses none in Jesus Christ, but those whom he has chosen in him; and he chooses only those whom he freely loves in him. "Come, inherit;" amiable, powerful, and efficacious words! which draw the elect near to God, and put them in possession of him. He who during his life has said, "Come, Lord Jesus," through a sincere desire of his coming, and through his fidelity and love, "Lord, possess my heart," shall, in his turn, hear these two words, "Come, inherit," which will actually confer on him eternal happiness.

35. For I was ahungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Good works done for God's sake, through Jesus Christ, in the Spirit of the Father and the Son, are the price of the glory prepared for the elect; prepared without merits, by a bounty altogether free, but merited by Christ; bestowed on works as their reward, but on such works as are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, and are the gifts of God. Who would not be forward to give to God, so good, so liberal, so rich in mercies? If it be too little for those who have fed and lodged the poor for the sake of God, to feed on him, to drink of his glory, and to be lodged in his bosom; let them imagine, if they can, somewhat greater. We believe this, but who can comprehend it?

36. Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

God rewards nothing but charity, because charity alone honours God. He rewards that only which a man does as a member of Jesus Christ, by his Spirit, and with respect to him; because God loves none but him, gives no grace but in him, and can glorify and make nothing live in his bosom but him alone. A garment of light and glory, the effusion and infusion of the divinity into the soul, and a perfect freedom from all evils and miseries,—are not these things capable of fixing the desires of man! Such is the happy retaliation which God exercises toward those who have clothed, visited, delivered, or comforted the poor, sick, and imprisoned members of his Son.

37. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, and fed *thee?* or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink?

Humility easily makes the righteous forget their good works. God cannot forget them; and this is sufficient. There are many who have a clear and enlightened faith, actually intent on Jesus Christ in every thing which they do; but there are abundantly more, whose faith is simple, less instructed and intelligent, who perform good actions in general for the sake of God and Christ. It is for the comfort of these that our blessed Lord assures us, that he has accepted their alms, though they might not perhaps actually think of him in bestowing them; and that he has less regard to the mind than to the heart.

38. When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee?*

Let us incessantly beg that faith which alone discovers Jesus Christ in the poor. Let us frequently exercise it with respect to his presence and residence in his members. Let us take care to awake and stir it up on those occasions wherein we may be tempted to neglect, despise, or treat the poor harshly, on the account of their personal faults. The most unworthy and most miserable have a merit and dignity invisible to the eyes of the flesh, and unimpaired by all their defects; because it is the merit of Christ himself.

39. Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

Jesus Christ is continually humbled, and suffers in his members to the end of the world. Happy are the poor who are religious, and have eyes to perceive Christ residing and enduring poverty in themselves! But still more happy are they, if they love their poverty as the source of this advantage! The less capable the poor, the sick, and those in prison are of penetrating into these truths, the greater charity it is to instruct them therein, and to engage them to make a Christian use of their condition.

40. And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch* as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. [* *Fr.* as often.]

What a comfort is it for those who assist the poor, the sick, and prisoners, to be more certain, that in so doing they serve Jesus Christ, than if they saw him with their eyes! "As often:" we must not therefore be discouraged by the multitude of the poor, nor weary of serving them to the end of our lives, if we are engaged thereto by a motive of piety, or by our own state and profession; since as often as we serve them, we serve Christ himself. "Unto one of the least:" let us then take heed not to neglect any, nor to apply ourselves out of natural inclination more to one than to another, but to those whom either the providence of God sends us, or their necessity obliges us to prefer.

41. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

It is an article of our faith, that those who are found without charity shall be treated as the devils, and have the same portion with them in eternity. O fatal and irrevocable exile! O eternal excommunication and separation from the body of Christ! Sad confinement in hell, and dismal society in suffering with the devils themselves! All this shows that it is more proper to tremble than to speak on this subject. Obdurate sinners are the angels, envoys, and missionaries of the devil, who establish his kingdom on earth, propagate his maxims, preach and authorize them by their example, and seduce and

pervert the children of God. Let us take care not to join ourselves to them in any respect.

42 For I was ahungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

How severely shall they be punished who take away the goods of others, when those are punished after this manner who only refuse to give what is their own! It is not out of indigence or inability that Christ suffers hunger in his members, but out of mercy, and to give us an opportunity of making some amends for our sins by our alms. In vain do we flatter ourselves that we should have fed Jesus Christ while he was on earth, if we show ourselves hard-hearted toward his suffering members.

43. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Who among us would not run to prisons and hospitals, if an apostle assured us that Jesus Christ was there, and stood in need of us? Christ himself tells us so, and we turn a deaf ear to him. If our conscience reproach us on this account, let us humble ourselves and amend. Christ now speaks this to us in his word, and out of mercy applies himself to our hearts, that he may not have occasion to speak it hereafter publicly in his anger at the great day.

44. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

It is want of faith which produces hard-heartedness toward the poor. The carnal man has only eyes of flesh and blood; he will not believe what he does not see. We find but too many who put on affected incredulity when we give them an account of the misery and wants of the poor, who seek vain pretences to excuse themselves from assisting them, or who even reject them with contempt or hard language. This is to feign themselves ignorant that it is Christ who asks an alms of them in the persons of the poor. It is to do that which is the ground of the condemnation of the reprobate.

45. Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, In-

asmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.

Every thing is in common between the head and the members; but Jesus Christ is chiefly in the poor and the humble. We at present colour and disguise our negligence or insensibility as we please; but our heart will one day appear such as it really was in respect of works of mercy. If we are ashamed to be reproached with covetousness by men, who will be able to bear a reproach of this nature from the mouth of Christ in the day of his fury? He makes the cause of the poor his own; and will resent any neglect of them as a neglect of himself.

46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

No appeal, no remedy, to all eternity; no end to the punishment of those whose final impenitence manifests in them, as it were, an eternal will and desire to sin. By dying in a settled opposition to God, they cast themselves into a necessity of continuing in an eternal aversion to him. The eternity of the torment of the damned proceeds from the infinite dignity of the God who is offended; the eternity of the reward of the elect from the infinite goodness of him who confers it on them. O eternal life, which art nothing but pure life and joy—not the joy of the world, but that substantial joy of which God alone is the source, the object, and the end—may I have nothing at heart but thee, may I seek nothing else during this mortal life!

CHAPTER XXVI.

SECT. I.—THE RULERS CONSPIRE AGAINST CHRIST.—HIS HEAD ANOINTED.

1. And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,

Christ having instructed the Jews by his discourses, edified them by his example, convinced them by his miracles, and loaded them with his benefits, prepares himself now to redeem them with his blood, and to sanctify them by his sacrifice. This new testimony of his love requires of us new attention, new respect, and new acknowledgment.

2. Ye know that after two days is *the feast of* the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.

To hear Christ speak, with such sedateness and tranquillity, of so cruel and ignominious a death to be suffered by him two days after, is a sufficient proof that this Son of man is likewise the Son of God. It is even something more than speaking of it, to foretell it as he does. Let us learn from hence, to look on the crosses which are prepared for us with the serenity and meekness of our Head. He teaches us to spare our enemies, by not so much as naming here his own. He joins the two passovers together, the figurative and the true, in order to teach us to imitate him, by always joining with the eucharistic passover the love of the cross, and a disposition to suffer whatever shall please God: this is the true evangelical passover.

3. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, 4. And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill *him*.

Who would not have thought that the priests and magistrates assembled together only to cause Jesus Christ to be received and proclaimed as the Messias, after all which they had seen and heard concerning him? Let us fear, lest, after

their example, the abuse of the light and grace of God should draw upon us the like blindness and infidelity. The designs of men, though contrary in their intention to those of Christ, are, notwithstanding, by his sovereign wisdom, made the means of bringing these to pass. How incomprehensible and adorable is his conduct!

5. But they said, Not on the feast *day*, lest there be an uproar among the people.

The wicked person regards religion no farther than it is subservient to his designs and interests. Who is there who keeps himself entirely free from this disorder? He who obeys the law only with regard to himself, loves himself and not the law. He who observes a feast-day on motives purely human, violates it in his heart.

6. ¶ Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7. There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat *at meat*.

Charity employs every thing it has for God. Riches are not at all to be regarded, but only so far as they are serviceable to Christ or his members. The contempt which he showed for riches, and his aversion to pleasures, hinder him not from admitting this unction: every thing is mysterious in this time of mysteries; every thing ought to contribute to the honour of Christ in this season of his lowest humiliations, and to the making Judas ashamed of his avarice, to which he is just going to sacrifice the blood and life of Jesus Christ himself.

8. But when his disciples saw *it*, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose *is* this waste? 9. For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.

One discontented or perverse spirit is enough to corrupt and disturb a whole community. How often does charity serve as a cloak for covetousness! We must not neglect what is due to Christ under pretence of what we owe his members. Men count every thing wasted which is expended in the external worship of God, when they love neither God nor his worship. Jesus Christ authorizes external worship, by accepting it at the very instant in which he was going to establish religion by a worship the most spiritual and internal.

10. When Jesus understood *it*, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.

It is then a good work to pay an external worship to God and Christ, and that sometimes even with lustre and expense. The church, calumniated on this account by the followers of the perfidious Judas, or by the imitators of these imperfect disciples, will still have Jesus Christ for her advocate. Nothing which is produced by charity can be evil in the sight of God. A waste of our gold and silver is of no moment in his account, when they are not wasted on our lusts; but it is a matter of great moment to grieve our neighbour, by discouraging his charity, out of temporal interest.

11. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.

Christ substitutes the poor in his stead, that he may be relieved in them. But that which we owe to them for his sake, cannot excuse us from paying what is due to him in his own person. He is always present with us in the eucharist, but after an invisible manner. He is visibly present here below only in the poor. It is in these that we must seek him, in order to assist and feed him, as we must seek him in the eucharist to feed on him.

12. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did *it* for my burial.

Love is quick in foreseeing things, and has sometimes instincts of which it knows not the cause. Let us admire the goodness and condescension of Christ, who anticipates the ceremony of his burial in favour of this holy woman, because he knows she will not have the comfort of embalming him after his death. True charity shall be rewarded for whatever it would have done; and Jesus Christ sees that in its intentions which it does not perceive itself. The actions of holy persons often contain mysteries which they understand not themselves; as that of Christ's burial is represented by this action of the woman. The solicitous care of Christ makes him improve all opportunities to renew the thoughts of his death, to prepare his true disciples for it, and to give some remorse to the traitor by discovering to him his own heart.

13. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached

in the whole world, *there* shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

God takes delight in distinguishing those actions which the world blames through a spirit different from his. Happy is that man who is contented with the approbation of Him who sees the heart! Good works embalm the whole church with their sweet odour. The contradiction of men passes away; the fruits and edification of such actions will subsist forever. A constant succession and perpetual tradition of them is continued by imitation. Let us esteem ourselves happy in being capable of conveying down this tradition, by a fervent application to anoint Jesus Christ in the poor and sick, either by relieving or comforting them.

SECT. II.—THE BARGAIN AND TREACHERY OF JUDAS.—THE PASCHAL SUPPER.

14. ¶ Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests.

A charitable reproof completes sometimes the obduration of a reprobate; however, he who gave it has done his duty. A provoked passion, or even a small disgust, has often caused that to be done to the church which Judas does in respect of its Head: making men betray its interests, and violate its faith, unity, peace, and discipline, by sacrilegious conspiracies with its enemies. Thus all heresies and schisms spring from the passions of men.

15. And said *unto them*, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

For a man to accuse Christ of nothing, and not to complain of him while he betrays him, is to justify him and to condemn himself. He who nourishes any passion in his heart, is in great danger of delivering up Christ and the church to their enemies upon every temptation. When a man hopes for any thing from the world, he ought to fear every thing from himself. He who treats and bargains with it, leaves his conscience very often in pawn, if he do not entirely resign it up thereto. There is nothing which we have not reason to fear

from avarice, since it stoops so low as to sell Jesus Christ at so vile a price.

16. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

Men seldom leave a crime imperfect. Unhappy he who engages himself therein for want of resisting the smallest beginnings! We are but too faithful to the world, and generally keep our word with it at the expense of all. What has God done to us, that he is the only person with whom we break it? Opportunities of finishing sin are seldom wanting when a man seeks them. The devil is too vigilant not to present them. Would to God that men were as diligent and faithful in seeking and embracing opportunities to disengage themselves from sin, to break off all familiarity with the wicked, and to renounce every dangerous conversation!

17. ¶ Now the first *day* of the *feast of* unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

See here the extreme poverty of Christ, who had no house of his own on earth! He who would fain settle himself here, as in his native country, is not his disciple. The disciples and imitators of his poverty follow the spirit of their Master, depend on providence, and live in peace all their days, without knowing either where or how it will provide for their necessities. A man is easy as to every thing when he has Jesus Christ in his heart.

18. And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. 19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

The command of Christ, the obedience of the disciples, and every thing which passes here, show plainly that he is truly the Master of all, who is going to suffer. He makes himself obeyed when he pleases; but he knows also how to obey when it is necessary, for the salvation of his people and for our example. He looks on the time of his sufferings and death as his own proper time; it is also the time of every Christian in this life.

20. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

A man must be a disciple of Jesus Christ in order to eat

the passover with him; that is, in order not to receive his body and blood in the eucharist unworthily, he must have learned in his school, which is the church, to believe the truths which God has revealed, to hope for the good things which he has prepared, and to love the commandments which he has enjoined. The Son of God, in this last assembly, which contains an abridgment, as it were, of the whole church, shows us the mixture of the good, the weak, and the wicked, who are all united in the participation of the same sacraments.

21. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

Prudence and charity require that we should use the greatest sinners tenderly to the last; admonishing, without discovering them. God does this continually, leaving the most impious persons unknown. Lord, thou seest, in my wretched will, the principle of all sorts of infidelity and treachery; but thou canst restrain it by thy own holy and almighty will. Do it, O Jesus, out of thy mercy and goodness.

22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

It is natural to the just to fear lest some sin should lie hid in their heart without their knowing it. A man ought always to think himself more subject to fall than others, because every one best knows his own weakness, and has reason to apprehend every thing from his own infidelity. There is a sorrow of foresight as well as of repentance. Can a man who reflects on his own corrupt heart, and sees temptation approaching, forbear sighing and being grieved at the danger of losing his God, to which he is continually exposed?

23. And he answered and said, He that dippeth *his* hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

Judas, admonished the second time, and that more plainly than before, is not at all the more affected thereby. When a heart is once hardened, it has no longer any ears to hearken to admonitions. The multiplying of benefits does but give it a new occasion of resisting more obstinately the goodness of God. It is the property of hardness of heart to make us,

like Judas, deaf, obdurate, and insensible, without perceiving that we are so.

24. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

Jesus Christ considers his death no otherwise than as a passage or journey. Long before the birth of his enemies, it was written of him that he must die, to make it evident that it is not through necessity, but obedience, that he dies for us. It is also by obedience that we must apply the merit of his death to ourselves. Wo to those who, like Judas, have no share therein but by their crime and treachery! Such is the crime of all wicked Christians, who deliver up, as it were, to the power of wickedness, Jesus Christ, who had taken possession of their hearts by baptism. But such, in a higher degree, is the crime of wicked priests, who betray Christ while they offer his (representative) body, and receive it with a guilty conscience themselves, while they cause others who are unworthy to receive it, while they either suffer sinners to continue in their disorders through negligence, ignorance, cowardice, interest, flattery, etc., or even encourage them to wickedness by a treachery like that of Judas.

25. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

Judas, admonished now the third time, hears all with the insensibility and impudence of an abandoned sinner. To imagine that God sees not the bottom of our heart, is an impiety not very common. We believe that every thing is present to him, and yet we do that in his presence which we would not do before a mortal man! Nothing so common, nothing so incomprehensible. There is neither reason, nor shame, nor faith, nor religion in a sinner entirely possessed and taken up with his sin.

SECT. III.—THE EUCHARIST.

26. ¶ And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

There is nothing more common and plain in appearance than that which Christ does here—but yet it is a mystery of

faith. God confounds the pride of carnal men, and exercises the humble faith of true Christians, in hiding his greatest mysteries under such veils as are common and contemptible to the eyes of the flesh. Let us believe, and we shall comprehend it. Holy and adorable words! which contain the establishment of the Christian worship, the institution of the new law, the contract of the true covenant, the testament of a dying Father, a commandment of the greatest importance, the foundation of the true religion, the substitution of reality in the room of shadows, and the end of all types and figures.

27. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

Jesus Christ makes his body and blood the price of our redemption, the victim of our sacrifice, the nourishment of our souls, and the bond of our union with God. Let us return sacrifice for sacrifice. The sacrifice of the outward man, by repentance, mortification, and purity; the sacrifice of the inward man, by adoration, thanksgiving, love, self-denial, and prayer, which are the soul of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and of every Christian sacrifice. The eucharistic sacrifice is an admirable contrivance of the wisdom of God, wherein every thing is rendered to God by his creatures; and every thing is given anew by God to his creatures in the communion.

28. For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Religion is a covenant with God, confirmed by the blood of the true victim. As long as religion shall continue on the earth, and until this covenant, which is but begun, shall be finished in the course of ages, it is necessary that this blood should be also really represented. Unhappy is that man who, by his sin, breaks a covenant cemented with the blood of God, who scandalizes a soul redeemed, or defiles a heart which has been sanctified by this blood!

29. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

The communion of the body and blood of Christ is a pledge or earnest of the communion in heaven. Jesus raised from the dead is a perfect new man, the Priest, the Victim, and

the Sacrifice of eternity. The whole church, renewed by the participation of his glory, and reunited to him as its Head, shall offer with and in him this sacrifice, and communicate thereof, by feeding on the uncreated Truth, the bread and wine of the elect. When shall this happy hour come, O my God!

30. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

Here is a pattern of thanksgiving after the communion. The sacrifice of our altars is itself a thanksgiving. But what acknowledgment do we not owe to God, for having afforded us so divine a means of enriching ourselves afresh, by returning him thanks for his former gifts? A communion-day is a day entirely set apart for thanksgiving, adoration, and hymns of joy, which are to be the beginning of the hymns and anthems of eternity. A man cannot pass such a day unprofitably without great infidelity, nor spend it in worldly diversions, such as dancing, play, comedies, or operas, without doing the greatest outrage to religion.

SECT. IV.—ST. PETER'S DENIAL FORETOLD.

31. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

Who has not reason to fear, when he sees the sufferings of Christ become an occasion of offence, even to the apostles themselves, and make them forget the duties of friendship, and the fidelity which disciples owed to so good a Master, after more than three years of instruction and miracles? Men often follow Christ and his maxims freely enough, until they meet with times of trial and temptation. Friends are the last refuge in affliction; but even this is wanting to Christ, and he thereby expiates the abuse of worldly friendships. Let us imitate him, instead of complaining, when our friends turn their backs upon us, and dare not declare for us.

32. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

The sheep forsake the Shepherd, but he forsakes not his sheep. He will seek, recall, and bring them back; and he

fortifies and comforts them beforehand with the hopes of his resurrection. Vulgar souls suffer themselves to be depressed by affliction, and can hardly receive any consolation: great souls always keep their station, and support others who are sinking.

33. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all *men* shall be offended because of thee, *yet* will I never be offended.

The presumptuous person imagines he can do every thing, and can do nothing; thinks he can excel all, and excels in nothing; promises every thing, and performs nothing. The humble man acts the quite contrary part. There is nothing so unknown to us as ourselves. Nothing which we see less, than our own poverty and weakness. Let us rather believe what God tells us of ourselves in Scripture, than what we perceive in ourselves. The strength of pride is but the strength of a moment. Vanity serves only to conceal from us what we are, and what we are not.

34. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Shall this earthen vessel have the presumption to think that it knows itself better than its Maker does? Our own experience is not sufficient to convince us of our frailty. It is not even sufficient that Christ assures us that our fall is near, and that, without his grace, it is infallible. A divine light is absolutely necessary, to pierce, illuminate, and change the heart.

35. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

The defenders of liberty against grace, like St. Peter, give the lie to Jesus Christ. St. Peter, who draws the other disciples into his own mistake and error, shows us plainly that nothing finds a readier admission and entertainment in the minds of such as have but an ordinary degree of faith, than this presumptuous opinion of their own strength. We are not to wonder, but to lament, that it is so common.

SECT. V.—CHRIST'S AGONY AND PRAYER IN THE GARDEN.—THE DISCIPLES ASLEEP.

36. ¶ Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

It is a true Christian foresight to prepare ourselves for sufferings and death, by retirement and prayer. The disciples had great occasion to pray; but the weak are not always to have their duty pressed upon them. It is better sometimes only to lay their wants before them, to leave them to find their own weakness, to pray for them, and to commit them to the grace of God. All are not capable of the same communications; it is necessary to know how to discern, not only between the weak and the strong, but also between the different degrees of weakness.

37. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

Jesus Christ imparts his sorrow and heaviness of heart to those whom he loves most. As the victim of sinners, he expiates their vain joys by his holy sorrows; as clothed with their persons, he undergoes that grief and contrition which they ought all to feel for their sins. This is the source from whence we must draw the spirit of contrition, and the wholesome sorrow of repentance, by adoring it in him, and praying that he would impress it on our hearts.

38. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

Such a sorrow as this in men is never the subject of their choice; there must be a divine strength and power in Christ to draw on himself this sorrow unto death, and to open his heart thereto. He delivered his soul to this internal tormentor of his own accord, as he also delivered his body to the external tormentors when he pleased. Good God! what a shame is it to see him deprive himself of the most supreme joy, and abandon himself to the deepest sorrow, for our sakes, while we will not sacrifice so much as one pleasure, satisfaction, or diversion to him! Let us faithfully accept all the

sorrows which may befall us here. Let us beseech Christ to sanctify them by that state of sorrow which he chose for our sakes. Let us make it our joy to continue, persevere, and watch therein with him.

39. And he went a little further, and fell on his face and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou *wilt*.

What posture ought a sinner to use before God, when he sees Jesus Christ "prostrate on his face" before his Father, to expiate the loftiness of our pride! He here teaches us always to look upon God as our Father, even when he afflicts us; to invoke him in this quality; to represent our wants to him; to beg of him deliverance, out of an humble sense of our own weakness; and to submit to his appointments with confidence in his assistance. Christ withdraws in the height of his agony, that he may spare his disciples. It is not expedient for a good pastor to let the weak know all the struggles and combats which he undergoes; it is prudence to hide his infirmities from them. It is the wisest way, on these occasions, to keep a reserved confidence with our friends, that we may not afflict or deject them too much.

40. And he cometh unto his disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

How few Christians set themselves to meditate on the agony and secret sufferings of Christ! Faithful friends in affliction are very rare. Christ would not spare himself this sort of grief, which is one of the most sensible afflictions of life, to see his friends so little concerned at his misfortunes, while he is so sensibly affected with theirs, beyond all imagination! We are but too ready to lose our sleep, when it is to watch with the world, and to share in the pleasures and diversions thereof during the night; but what pain, what sluggishness seizes us, when we should watch one hour with Christ, either by way of mortification, or out of charity toward a sick person, or to praise God in the great solemnities, or to adore Jesus Christ in his sufferings, to take part in his afflictions by prayer, and to beg the spirit and grace to do it!

41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.

A good pastor, a true father, after the example of Christ, takes care of the salvation of his flock to the last. He who exhorts his flock to watchfulness and prayer, is sure to make an impression upon them, if they see him watch and pray himself. In perilous conjunctures men sometimes fall asleep, and rely on some sudden gust of courage and sensible fervour, wherewith they flatter themselves; and are often too late convinced, that they have more presumption than strength. Christian vigilance and humble prayer are the source of all our strength. The former renders the vigilance of the devil ineffectual; the latter procures the vigilance and protection of God.

42. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

The example of Jesus Christ teaches us to resign ourselves to the will of God, and to redouble our prayers at the apprehension of death, the approach of dangers, and the presence of afflictions. How holily is a pastor's heart divided, between the vigilance of his function, and his recourse to God; between his attendance on his flock, and the care of his own salvation! The fear here showed by our Head under his voluntary weakness, is a great lesson of humility for his members, in the midst of so many necessities, voluntary and involuntary. Clothe me, Lord, with thy courage and thy strength, through that goodness which inclined thee to put on our fear and our weakness!

43. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

Men sacrifice with joy their sleep and whole nights to ambition, avarice, and pleasure; but they cannot afford one to God, to charity, and to their own salvation.

44. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Let us not be tired with studying this pattern of perseverance, humility, and simplicity in prayer. Let us learn to

speak little, and to humble ourselves much therein. This is the model of the prayer of penitents, humbled under the almighty hand of God; as that of perfect Christians, of priests, and the chief pastors of the church, is exhibited in the prayer given us in the seventeenth chapter of St. John. Let us comfort ourselves with Christ, when God makes us sensible of our barrenness and poverty in prayer. If he reduces us to one single good thought, to one comfortable word, or to one pious motion, it is reasonable that we should be contented therewith, and humbly make use of it.

45. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take *your* rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Self-love renders us more vigilant when danger is present, than all the advice of our most discerning friends. If we are moved with indignation to see holiness itself in the hands of sinners, let us lay the blame on ourselves, since they were our sins which delivered up Christ to sinners. His charity is busily employed to the end. Let us adore this last use which he makes of his liberty, to admonish his disciples, and to wake them from their heaviness and slumber.

46. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

Happy he, who, through zeal for God's justice, or through charity toward his neighbour, goes forth to meet the cross, and even death itself! but so as not to do any thing contrary either to the command of God, or to other duties which regard our neighbour, or to what prudence and humility require of us as to ourselves. Jesus Christ takes notice of all the steps of his enemies, to make it evident that nothing is done contrary to his will, that they do only what he permits, and that they seize him because he is willing they should.

SECT. VI.—THE KISS OF JUDAS.—MALCHUS'S EAR CUT OFF.—THE FLIGHT OF THE DISCIPLES.

47. ¶ And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Terrible change! from one of the leaders of Christ's flock,

to a leader of wolves and robbers! He who trembles not at the sight of so unaccountable a fall, little knows how far the blindness and wickedness of man's heart can proceed. Let us fear, in proportion to the holiness of our state and condition. The higher the station is from whence we fall, the less hope is there of any recovery.

48. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast. 49. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed him.

The conduct of Judas is the picture of that of hypocrites. Let us adore the God and Restorer of peace, betrayed by a false token thereof. The world is full of this kind of civilities and insidious compliments, which tend only to deliver us up to it and to destroy us. It behoves every one who loves his own salvation to stand on his guard. A man must have a heart as full of the meekness and peace of charity as that of Christ was, not to refuse a kiss of peace to so perfidious an enemy, and so unnatural a traitor. How will this condemn those who cannot bear the presence, or even the sincere civilities of a repenting enemy!

50. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

As is the heart, such is the tongue—mild, charitable, and ready to anticipate even a traitor, and that at a time when the most moderate are apt to lose all patience. The last word which Christ uses in order to make Judas recollect himself, serves only to harden him the more. But it may often be very serviceable to us, either to remind us of the duties of our calling, or to repulse the temptations which would carry us at a distance from them. The captivity of Jesus Christ is the effect, the punishment, and the remedy of the ill use which we make of our liberty; and the consolation of those who lose their own, whether justly or unjustly.

51. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out *his* hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear.

Human presumption puts men upon human endeavours, and produces a blind, indiscreet, and irregular zeal. Christian

humility makes them have recourse to the divine power, and inspires nothing but prudence, meekness, and charity. An engagement of word or honour may for a while keep a man to his duty; but grace alone can make him persevere in it to the end.

52. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

Jesus Christ will not be served in the same manner with secular friends, nor be defended with an arm of flesh. Private persons have [ordinarily] no right to repel any violence supported by public authority, no, not even for the sake of religion. The cause of a Christian is the cause of God; suffering belongs to one, and vengeance to the other. Were there nothing to be suffered from men, there could be no martyrs in the world.

53. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

The first article of our faith is to believe in "One God the Father Almighty." Whoever is thoroughly rooted and established in this truth, enjoys a perfect repose in the midst of the most powerful enemies. Our wants and distresses cannot be hid from the wisdom of God, nor disregarded by the goodness of such a Father, nor irremediable to him who is almighty.

54. But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

Jesus Christ died not through weakness, but through obedience, zeal, and charity. Whenever God does not deliver us from our evils and afflictions, it is because they are comprehended within the unchangeable designs of his wisdom, goodness, and omnipotence, declared in the Scriptures; and then it is our glory to be subservient to them, our perfection to submit to them, and our eternal advantage never to decline them. Christ has the Scripture always before his eyes, as containing the plan of God's designs, both as to himself and us. Let us imitate him herein; for in them is the inexhaustible fountain of Christian hope and consolation.

55. In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out

as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.

How adorable are this tranquillity and meekness! and how worthy to be imitated by every Christian on the like occasion! The captivity of holy persons is never idle and inactive; their charity is always free, and always intent on the benefit of their neighbour. Nothing but a total inability can hinder a pastor from discharging his ministry. If captive, he draws from captivity itself an occasion to open the eyes of his most furious and blind persecutors, by reflections suited to their condition.

56. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

Jesus, exactly faithful in fulfilling the Scriptures, presents the light of them to his enemies, as well as to his disciples, in order to dispel their darkness. The word of God has always infallibly its effect. All the steps of our blessed Saviour are steps of obedience. The cowardice of the disciples convinces them, at last, that Christ knows better what is in man than man himself. Lord, I cannot adhere to thee but by thy assistance; forsake me not therefore, I beseech thee, that so I may not forsake thee.

SECT. VII.—JESUS LED TO CAIAPHAS, CONDEMNED, AND ABUSED.

57. ¶ And they that had laid hold on Jesus led *him* away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

Let us adore Jesus Christ, humbled in his three offices or qualities of High Priest, Prophet, and King, by appearing before those who possessed these qualities among the Jews. Would to God that this sort of humiliation were not often renewed in succeeding ages, when his truth is condemned or deserted by those who ought to teach or defend it! Let us honour the priesthood and the magistracy, even in those who abuse it; and let us conscientiously submit ourselves thereto.

58. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.

How weak are the endeavours of nature when left to itself!

We cannot distrust it too much, nor adhere too close to Christ. When a man is weak, and can only follow Christ afar off, he must avoid all dangerous occasions, and the company of such persons who will but increase his weakness. He who does that out of curiosity, or some human motive, which he ought to do for the sake of God, will find therein a snare and an occasion of falling, instead of his own justification.

59. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;

Had they sought true witness in order to clear him, his whole life abounded with it. This proceeding of the council of the Jews is too exact a representation of what the envious continually put in practice against the best of men. They first resolve to ruin them, and then seek the proper means of effecting it, how unjust soever it be. They suppose or declare them criminal; and after that, use their utmost endeavour to discover and fix some crime upon them.

60. But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, *yet* found they none. At the last came two false witnesses. 61. And said, This *fellow* said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

It is the constant practice of the envious and unjust, to change the words of those whom they do not love, and so make them the heads of their accusation. It is easy, by means of a few small alterations, to render the most holy truths, and the most innocent persons odious to the world. O sacred humanity of Jesus, thou art truly the temple of God, built up by the mystery of thy incarnation, destroyed on the cross, and rebuilt by thy glorious resurrection! Nay, thou art more, since thou art the victim of this adorable temple, and since it is the destruction of this temple which makes the sacrifice of thy religion the glory of God and the salvation of men.

62. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what *is it which* these witness against thee?

Jesus, as being the truth itself, deigns to be humbled by false witnesses. There is a time to defend the truth by apologies, and a time to suffer for it in an humble silence. It was

necessary for mankind that there should be a victim to merit for them the grace to receive the truth; and also an example of patience, to encourage them to endure calumnies. To this end, Christ came into the world; to this end, he suffers himself to be accused without so much as opening his mouth in his own justification.

63. But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

The silence of the eternal Word confounds the pride of the sons of Adam, who are always eager to justify themselves. A calumny which destroys itself needs no refutation. The abusing the name of God, considered as the ever-living truth, and employing it against the truth itself, is a crime not at all scrupled by those who are most obliged to honour it, when once the spirit of calumny has taken possession of their hearts.

64. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Men ought to reverence the name and authority of God, even in his most unworthy ministers, and not to give offence to the weak, nor afford matter of new accusations, by unnecessarily disputing concerning the abuse of authority. Christ had no disposition to be silent upon a truth for which he designed to die, and which was to make so many martyrs after his example. How odious soever any truth is become through the power and envy of its enemies, we are obliged to declare for it, when an account of it is publicly demanded of us.

65. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.

Let us adore Jesus Christ, treated as a blasphemer, who is the glory of his Father. His patience under the most unjust and outrageous accusations is a very great lesson for his disciples. See here a false zeal, a mask of religion, and a passionate and seditious way of proceeding, tending only to incense and stir up others, all which are common to those who would oppress truth by cabal and without proof. By crying

out heresy, blasphemy, and faction, though contrary to all appearance, men fail not to stir up those in power, to gain the simple, to give some shadow of authority to the ill-disposed, to cast devout but ignorant people into diffidence and scruples, and thereby to advance the mystery of iniquity, which is the mystery of all ages.

66. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

The Author of life, and Life eternal itself, is then judged worthy of death; and can we complain after this of the injustice of human judgments as to ourselves? All the forms of justice are violated in order to oppress this innocent person; the judge becomes a party and accuser, and proceeds to the verdict without examining whether all the prophecies concerning the Messias, and the miracles which he wrought without number and without example, did not justify him. Examination and proof are the ruin of calumnies, and of the authors of them; and therefore they take care to keep off from those two things.

67. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote *him* with the palms of their hands.

See here those affronts and indignities which the world thinks it has a right never to pardon, and which the Son of God endures with a divine meekness. Let us cast at the feet of Christ, so unworthily treated by his creatures, that false honour, that quick sense of affronts, that unreasonable niceness which cavils at every trifle, exaggerates every thing, and pardons nothing; and above all, that diabolical inflexibility in the resentment of injuries. The more Christ is abased on our account, the more ought we to adore him. That which he suffers in his face, condemns those who idolize their own, and that criminal care which they take to render themselves agreeable to others thereby.

68. Saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

Jesus Christ, foretold and promised to the Jews under the quality of a Prophet, is humbled by them as a prophet, and in respect of his divine knowledge. Strange corruption of the mind of man, so fond of prophecy and predictions, so

ready to give ear to false prophets on their own word; and yet so very backward to believe the prophecies of the true Prophet, though confirmed by so many miracles; and so eager and zealous in persecuting him.

SECT. VIII.—ST. PETER'S DENIAL AND REPENTANCE.

69. ¶ Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. 70. But he denied before *them* all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

A man thinks himself able to suffer death for the sake of God, who cannot withstand even a servant's voice. Every one carries within himself that concupiscence which tempts him to renounce Christ. It is absolutely necessary to keep it always in subjection as a servant, to hinder it from becoming a master. What darkness otherwise will it not cause in the understanding? What forgetfulness of favours, duties, and promises in the memory? What weakness, confusion, and infidelity in the will? Support us, Lord, with thy own hand; for there is nothing on which we can depend but thy grace.

71. And when he was gone out into the porch, another *maid* saw him, and said unto them that were there, This *fellow* was also with Jesus of Nazareth. 72. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

When we have once forgotten God, and are left by him to ourselves, to be tempted and to be overcome are almost one and the same thing. One temptation unresisted, seldom fails of being succeeded by another,—a second and greater infidelity is the punishment of the first, and very often the occasion of a third. Peter joins perjury to infidelity. Let the example of an apostle make us tremble.

73. And after a while came unto *him* they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art *one* of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. 74. Then began he to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.

How far does the weakness of man proceed? We could not have an instance of it in the Prince of pastors; but he chose to give it us in the person of one of the prime apostles, to oblige all to bear with the infirmities of the greatest sinners. Deplorable progress of infidelity and blindness in an apostle in so short a time, occasioned only by his fear of some

mean servants, and in reference to a Master whom he had acknowledged to be truly God. He might possibly have proceeded even as far as Judas, had God left him any longer to himself.

75. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

A small matter makes us fall, when God does not support us; a small matter raises us again, when his grace makes use of it. The internal grace of conversion is generally affixed to something external. This eminent minister of Christ teaches others by his example that, in order to a true conversion, it is necessary to forsake the occasions of sin, to weep and lament for it before God and man, and to remember and meditate upon the words of Jesus Christ. Lord, how suddenly does thy grace change the heart, when it undertakes to do it! Change mine, I beseech thee, and draw from it the tears of a sincere repentance!

CHAPTER XXVII.

SECT. I.—CHRIST DELIVERED TO PILATE.—THE REPENTANCE AND DEATH OF JUDAS.

1. When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: 2. And when they had bound him, they led *him* away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

Let us adore Jesus Christ bound as a malefactor, and delivered up as a profane person to the secular power. He herein bears the punishment of the sinner, who deserves to be haled thus before the judgment-seat of God. This is the consolation of guilty prisoners, the glory of the innocent, and a source of graces and merits to sanctify our liberty, and the use we should make thereof, to bless the bonds of those who are in captivity, and to hallow their condition.

3. ¶ Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was

condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

Behold the false repentance of a reprobate! The devil blinds the sinner before the commission of sin, in order to hurry him into it; and opens his eyes afterward, to cast him into despair. There is no beneficial sight and sense of our faults but what proceeds from the grace of Christ. A man may know his sin, conceive an abhorrence of it, repent of it, confess it, restore his ill-gotten goods, retire from the occasion, and yet be a false penitent like Judas. All becomes ineffectual, when a man has his eyes only upon the justice of God through a servile fear, without turning them toward his mercy by a Christian hope. That which was wanting to Judas, and is the only refuge of sinners, is humbly to have recourse to God by Jesus Christ.

4. Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What *is that* to us? see thou *to that*.

There is a sacrilegious confession, a diabolical humiliation, and a despairing repentance. These, without an extraordinary grace, are the natural consequences of calumny, incited by avarice and self-interest, and become irreparable by oppressing the innocent. It is a terrible judgment, not to be able to find one friend ready to offer us his hand after our fall. This is a just punishment for having left the society of the good, and despised the charitable hand of Christ. A true pastoral charity is to be found only in the apostolic church. Those who engage us in a sinful course seldom trouble themselves to recover us out of it. It is natural to mercenary pastors to be unconcerned at the fall of their sheep.

5. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

For want of confidence, repentance is false. See here the miserable and desperate end of a covetous wretch, gnawed by the remorse of his conscience for his injustice in acquiring his wealth, and delivered up to the despair of his own mind. Every thing is wanting to a sinner, when hope is wanting; and there can be no hope in God, where there is no love of God. If nothing but fear of punishment excite a man to

repentance, the more vehement this is, the more it leads to despair.

6. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.

Who would not admire this great care of the chief priests in not defiling the holy treasury with profane money, while at the same time they scruple not to defile their own consciences with the greatest of crimes, and deliver up the true Temple of God to profane men? Thus it is that the devil often deludes many, even among the priests, by a false and superstitious tenderness of conscience in things indifferent, while calumny, envy, oppression of the innocent, and the most heinous sins, give them no manner of trouble or disturbance.

7. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.

Blind and merciless priests, very careful in laying out Judas's money, but not in the least concerned what would become of his soul! Would to God that abundance of Christians were not under the same blindness! Jesus Christ himself honours his death and burial, by making the price of his blood serviceable to the burying of Jewish strangers. His charity in doing good to his enemies is indefatigable; and his wisdom continually intent on turning every circumstance of their crime to some advantage. He does this good to the foreign Jews, perhaps, because they, not having been witnesses of his life and miracles, were the chief persons who cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

8. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. 9. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; 10. And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

The Holy Scripture, having foretold every thing, renders all the Jews utterly inexcusable. In vain do the wicked endeavour to conceal themselves; God makes them instrumental in discovering their own wickedness. Judas, by returning back the money, and the priests by laying it out, raise to themselves an eternal monument—the one of his treachery, the others of their perfidiousness.

SECT. II.—CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.—BARABBAS.—THE CLAMOUR OF THE JEWS AGAINST CHRIST.

11. And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.

Jesus Christ answers out of respect to the authority of God, whose image he would honour even in a wicked judge. A man is not freed from the obligation of bearing witness to the truth, though the usefulness and advantage of it do not appear; and though on the contrary it may be the occasion of a kind of scandal, of persecution, and even of the death of him who bears it. Christ here witnesses "a good confession," as St. Paul calls it, (1 Tim. vi. 13,) which establishes his divinity, the power of his cross, the kingdom of his truth, and the inviolable rights and almighty strength of his grace. Christ knows how to reconcile the modesty of humility, without disclaiming his sovereignty. How rare and difficult is this!

12. And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. 13. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? 14. And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.

A man may show a contempt of accusations by a generous silence when he sees that truth is not sought, but only a pretence of crimes to justify persecution. None are more worthy of contempt, and more unworthy to hear the voice of truth, than those who persecute it knowingly, as these chief priests and elders did. Silence under calumny is something more wonderful than miracles. These priests admire it not, because it confounds them; but a heathen is greatly affected with it, because he is not so averse to truth, has more sincerity, and is less under the dominion of his passions. When a man has once given himself up to envy and detraction, he is entirely possessed by them; his senses, his understanding, and his heart are become their perfect slaves. Dreadful, though voluntary captivity! Preserve us, Lord, from so great a misfortune!

15. Now at *that* feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. 16. And they had then a notable

prisoner, called Barabbas. 17. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?

A comparison strangely humbling! What sinner could bear it without murmuring? We often find in a secular magistrate more inclination to support the truth, than in those who are obliged by their profession to defend it. A moral heathen would sometimes be more affected with the condition of an innocent person oppressed, than even Christians and corrupt priests.

18. For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

Since envy is capable of putting Christ himself to death, how necessary is it to extinguish even the least sparks thereof! Truth is sometimes persecuted through policy, sometimes through engagement, complaisance, surprise, or ignorance; but the most implacable of all its enemies is envy, and especially that of ecclesiastical persons. Too often men think they lend their authority to justice and truth, when a little reflection would show them that they resign it up to iniquity and envy.

19. ¶ When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

Wives have frequently but too much credit and influence on the mind of judges, even in unjust causes; but nothing is favourable to the cause of Christ, because our sins are against him. Every thing testifies his innocence; but it is on this very account, because he is innocence itself, that he must die for sinners, and be their victim.

20. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

We see here how dangerous in the church wicked priests are. When pastors are once corrupted, they are capable of inducing their flock to prefer Barabbas before Jesus, the world before God, pleasure before their salvation, and their passions before a life of faith and Christian mortification. A wise and pious director of the conscience is a proper guide to seek and find Jesus Christ. An ignorant or vicious director

is good for nothing but to destroy and extinguish his life in the soul.

21. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

This is, on the part of men, a criminal preference of a murderer before the Author of life; but, on the part of God, it is a necessary preference in order to our salvation. The Father delivers up his only Son for every one of us, and prefers our salvation to his life. It is an extreme humiliation for Christ to be judged less worthy to live than a robber and murderer. This gives us an abhorrence; and yet what else does a sinner do but pass the same judgment, when, after having tasted of Christ and of the sweetness of his Spirit, he forsakes him to deliver himself up to sin? This momentary pleasure which we prefer to Jesus Christ, is it not a robber of our goods, and a murderer of our life; the one more excellent without comparison than the goods of fortune, and the other, than the life of the body?

22. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?

How many are there, even among Christians, who know not what use they ought to make of Christ, either because they neglect to learn, or because due care is not taken to instruct them! What shall we do with Jesus, if we make him not our Mediator, our Saviour, our Life, our Strength to go to God, our Refuge in all our evils, and the object of our adoration, acknowledgment, love, confidence, and religion; since in reality God has made him our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption?

They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. 23. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

What strange fury proceeds from blindness! To deliver up to death Him who gives life to the soul, and to save him who takes away the goods, ease, and life of the body! Let our indignation be kindled more against our own sins than against the Jews; since they are those which cry out by the mouth of these, and require the death of Christ. It is abso-

lutely necessary that God should be satisfied, and he will not be so otherwise than by the sacrifice of the cross. Let us suffer with Christ, at least in some manner, that which we make him suffer. Let our flesh, with its affections and lusts, be nailed to the cross with him.

24. ¶ When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but *that* rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye *to it.*

In vain does a cowardly judge cast on others the injustice which he commits: God will certainly judge him. That which a judge, a magistrate, a person in authority, owes to innocence, consists not in words, excuses, or a bare testimony in its favour, but in a real protection. He who does not oppose injustice to the utmost of his power when he ought, is no better than a prevaricator. The world is full of persons like Pilate, very favourably disposed toward what is good, who yet scarce ever do any; very zealous for truth, justice, and innocence, provided it cost them nothing, and that they be not obliged to declare openly on their side.

25. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children.

The blood of Jesus Christ is the salvation of some, and the condemnation of others. Men expose themselves to all manner of evils in order to satisfy their passions. The sinner knows not what it is to be accountable to God for the blood of his Son. Though, when he gives himself up to sin, he does not perhaps speak so plainly as the Jews here do, yet his sin itself speaks the same thing for him. Lord, let thy blood be on me, to redeem me; on my heart and body, to purify them; on my thoughts and desires, to sanctify them; and on my life and actions, to consecrate them entirely to thee.

SECT. III.—CHRIST SCOURGED, CROWNED WITH THORNS, AND MOCKED.

26. ¶ Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *him* to be crucified.

When the love of justice is surmounted by interest, human

respects, and the prospect of improving a man's fortune, after some weak and faint opposition he yields at length to iniquity. A judge who has not courage enough openly to oppose injustice, will, on the first occasion, insensibly become a slave thereto. Every one of us is this Barabbas, delivered from death by that of Jesus. Who is that adopted child who will refuse to be chastised by the hand of God his Father, when he sees his only-begotten Son scourged by the hands of executioners?

27. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band *of soldiers*. 28. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

Let us adore Jesus Christ, given up to the rage of the soldiers. He is the consolation of holy persons in this condition, and of the church exposed to the violence and insults of the men of the sword, and of the wicked. By being stripped in order to suffer, to be mocked, and to clothe us with his righteousness, he condemns and expiates that criminal unseemliness in dress which has impurity and pride for its root, and for its fruit, sin, scandal, and a kind of idolatry. Can those who ruin themselves, to outshine others in the sumptuousness of their apparel, behold Jesus Christ in this condition, and not be ashamed of their vanity and injustice?

29. ¶ And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

Let the crown of thorns make those Christians blush who throw away so much time, pains, and money, in beautifying and adorning a sinful head. Can those who exact even a kind of adoration from men, consider Christ in this condition, without being humbled for their pride? Let the world do what it will to render thy royalty and mysteries contemptible, O Jesus! it is my glory to serve a King thus abased, my salvation to adore that which the world despises, and my religion to go to God by the merits of a God crowned with thorns.

30. And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

Let us pay our adoration, and humble ourselves in silence,

at the sight of a spectacle which faith alone renders credible, and which our senses would hardly endure. Jesus Christ, in this condition, preaches to the kings of the earth this truth, that their sceptres are but reeds, with which they shall be smote, bruised, and crushed at his tribunal, if they do not use them here to the advancement of his kingdom in the world. This reed in the hand of Christ will be changed into a sceptre of love for some, and into a rod of iron for others. It is in our power to choose which we please.

31. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify *him*.

All the rules of justice which protect criminals from the insults of private persons, are violated in respect of Christ. Would to God he were not still made the daily laughing-stock of the wicked by their raillery and their pretended acts of worship. To make him subservient to any passion whatever, is to mock him. Let us follow Jesus Christ going toward the cross loaded with reproaches and ignominies. But how can we follow thee, O Jesus, if thou thyself dost not draw us by the virtue of this cross?

SECT. IV.—THE CROSS CARRIED BY SIMON.—THE CRUCIFIXION.—THE THIEVES.

32. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

We see in Simon the Cyrenian a representation of the flesh, which bears not the cross but by constraint, and being mortified by the spirit. Let us bless the Lord that he does not in this matter consult our inclinations. If God waited for us, and our choice of crosses and afflictions, Jesus Christ crucified would have but few imitators. That he chooses them for us, and often lays them upon us by the hands of men, is a mercy which renders the cross more beneficial, and spares our weakness.

33. ¶ And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, 34. They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted *thereof*, he would not drink.

The comforts of the world are always mingled with gall.

It never flatters us but in order either to ruin or intoxicate us, as the Jews would refresh Christ for fear he should escape their cruelty, and to prolong his sufferings. Jesus chooses to suffer, and to adore God his Father, even to the last gasp. The children of Adam do what they can to assuage their pain, and to render themselves insensible thereof; the true children of the cross are very glad to join the sacrifice of their heart to that of their sufferings by the exercise of their faith.

35. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

Jesus Christ, behaving himself as a criminal, does not dispose even of his clothes. In every thing he gives us a great submission to the laws of humility, of poverty, of contempt of worldly things. He who, at the time of death, is not perplexed with the care of dividing his earthly substance, may offer up his sacrifice with much more peace and application of his mind to God. Christ bears the shame of nakedness which sin brought upon man, in his body; and repairs that deplorable deprivation of the gifts of God wherewith the sinner was punished in his soul. Vouchsafe, O Lord, hereby to give me a salutary shame and confusion, on the account of my poverty, and of my corporal and spiritual nakedness.

36. And sitting down they watched him there;

We see but too many near the altar while the sacrifice is offering, as the soldiers were near the cross, who not only receive no profit from it themselves, but likewise hinder others from profiting as they ought by the attention and devotion of their minds. Happy that person, who, in perfect tranquillity of soul, has no other business but to place himself at the foot of the cross by meditation, that he may adore the Author of his salvation, and engrave his image on his own heart!

37. And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

The Holy Ghost, master both of the tongue and hands of the wicked, makes them often speak very great truths, when

they design only to ridicule and expose them. This title is the sentence of the condemnation of false Jews, and the title of the purchase of true Israelites, Jews or Gentiles, made by Jesus Christ on the cross. Yes, Lord, by thy death thou hast acquired a right to subject the world to thyself, and to form thy church out of all the people of the earth. Happy I, in finding myself in the number of those over whom thou hast been pleased to preserve thy rights!

38. Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left.

Jesus Christ is compared and joined with criminals, to show that he came for the sake of sinners, and that for them he sheds his blood. The crucifixion of Christ between two thieves is a lively representation of the mixture of good and bad in the present church, and of the separation which will be made of them at the last day. All are sinners till they are crucified with Christ, and partake of the merits of his death; but all those who partake outwardly of them in the body of the church, are not on that account justified before God. Sinners, penitent and impenitent, divide all mankind, represented here by these two thieves.

SECT. V.—BLASPHEMIES AGAINST CHRIST.—DARKNESS.—HE CRIES OUT, AND DIES.

39. ¶ And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, 40. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

Let us adore Jesus Christ crucified, and exposed to the contempt, the scoffs, and blasphemies of men: he will continue exposed to them to the end of the world. This is an occasion of scandal to those who view it only with carnal eyes. A High Priest who designs to destroy the temple of God; a Saviour who saves not himself; and a Son of God crucified,—these are the contradictions which give offence to Jews and libertines. But a High Priest who dispels the types and shadows only that he may disclose the substance of religion, and become the minister of a heavenly sanctuary; a Saviour who dies only to be the victim of salvation; and a

Son of God who confines his power within the bounds of the cross, to establish the righteousness of faith,—this is what a Christian adores, this is the foundation of all his confidence.

41. Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, 42. He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

Few are there who, after the example of Christ, can bear the humiliation of the cross to the last, and the insults of carnal men. These insults under humiliation, are, to virtuous persons, one of the strongest and severest trials. It is a just cause to make us tremble and humble ourselves, to see the chief priests and corrupt doctors the first who deride the cross, and those who profess to love it. A man is very blind and ignorant as to the designs of God, when he refuses to adore and follow a crucified King. Make men comprehend, O my God, that it is by the cross that thou wilt reign in their hearts; and that this obstacle to the faith of the Jews is the source, the object, and the strength of the Christian's faith, and the consolation, hope, and love of the elect!

43. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have* him: for he said, I am the Son of God. [* *Fr.* love.]

Carnal man cannot imagine that God loves those whom he permits to suffer; that he whom he exercises by afflictions can put his trust in him; and that a person crucified can have God for his Father. Blessed be thou, O Lord, for having taught me by faith that the cross is a gift of thy love, the foundation of our confidence, the mark of lawful children, and the title which gives us a right to the inheritance and kingdom of the Father! Cause me to love that which I believe.

44. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

The cross is a matter of scandal to all those who, being punished for their sins, make not a penitential use of it. The wicked suffer, blaspheming; many even of the righteous, complaining; few, like Jesus Christ, silent, and humbling themselves. If crosses are not as it were anointed by the Spirit

of God, they become an insupportable burden, a subject of murmuring, and an occasion of sin.

45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

This miraculous darkness should have made the enemies of Christ understand that he was the light of the world; and that, because they did not follow it, it was taken from them. But darkness is always darkness to those who are abandoned to that of their own heart, whereof the other is no more than a figure.

46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

In the most virtuous persons, though the spirit love the cross, yet the flesh ceases not to complain thereof. This cry should make us in some measure conceive what it is to bear not only the judgment of God, but the whole flood of his anger and justice. It is less a complaint than an instruction, in the mouth of Christ, whereby he would fix our minds on the greatness of his sufferings, the mysteries of his cross, and the severity of his Father's conduct toward him in his death. How many things does this *why* comprehend? It is a question which cannot be fully answered, but by explaining the fall of Adam and of his posterity in him, the design of God's mercy as to their reparation and recovery, the nature and rigour of his justice, the necessity of a sacrifice worthy of God, and all the incomprehensible designs of his wisdom in the establishment of the Christian religion, and in the work of eternal salvation.

47. Some of them that stood there, when they heard *that*, said, This *man* calleth for Elias. 48. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled *it* with vinegar, and put *it* on a reed, and gave him to drink. 49. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

The cross is a scandal to heretics and to the wicked, who falsify and corrupt the word of God, and ridicule the mysteries of faith. Wo to the wicked, who continue and increase the sufferings of Christ, while the righteous fulfil them holily in themselves! That which is done here by the people who

stand round about the cross, is a representation of what passes frequently at our altars, where a very small number apply themselves to offer up, in spirit and in truth, the (representative) sacrifice of Jesus Christ; but where abundance of persons, through the evil disposition of their hearts, give as it were vinegar to Christ inflamed with the thirst of their salvation.

50. ¶ Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

This cry of Jesus teaches us, that his death does not proceed from the decay of his strength, but from the excess of his love; that his life is not taken from him by violence, but that he gives it up by his power. It is, on the part of the Jews, a Deicide and a sacrilege; but on his own, it is a most holy and voluntary sacrifice. O cry of Jesus! penetrate to the very bottom of my heart, cure its deafness, and wake it from its drowsiness, that it may be entirely employed in adoring, loving, and praising a God dying for its salvation, and in humbling itself before his cross! This last moment of Christ's life is, to dying persons, the object of their confidence. Let my spirit, O Jesus, be received with thine, and let thy death sanctify mine!

SECT. VI.—THE MIRACLES AFTER CHRIST'S DEATH.—THE CENTURION.

51. And, behold, the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

God delays not long to manifest and exalt the glory of his Son. He takes care to honour the humiliations and sufferings of his elect and of their Head. The vail of sin, which separated us from the sanctuary, and obstructed our sight and entrance into it, is rent by the sacrifice of Christ; and the figurative sanctuary is exposed to the view of the whole world, as having lost every thing which made it holy and venerable. Let thy death, O Jesus, work in my heart the same miracles; let it have always before its eyes that heavenly sanctuary, where all its hopes are placed; let it quake

through a holy dread of thy mysteries and judgments; and let it be rent by the sorrow of a true contrition.

52. And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, 53. And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

All nature seems to answer that expostulation of Christ, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" by declaring the fruits of his death. The vail being rent, shows that this death is to put an end to the figurative worship, and to establish the true religion and holiness. The earthquake, that it is to make known on earth the eternal judgments of God on sinners. The rocks being rent, declare that it is to make way for the grace of repentance. The graves being opened, that it is to destroy the death of sin, and to confer the life of grace on sinners. And, in the last place, the rising of the saints shows that it is to merit and publish the eternal happiness of body and soul for the children of promise. O adorable death, imprint thyself on my mind, and produce therein all these effects!

54. Now when the centurion, and they that were him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Let us honour these first effects of the death of Jesus Christ wrought on the centurion and the pagan soldiers. Who, considering these, will not hope? It is good to be near the cross; its virtue diffuses itself even among those who are ignorant of its power and holiness: it is a great matter not to be averse to it, while all the world dishonours it. Those who knowingly and out of passion oppose the truth, are without comparison at a greater distance from salvation, than those who serve the passions of its persecutors out of ignorance, and in barely discharging their office. God has often pity on these; the others are scarce ever to be converted.

SECT. VII.—THE HOLY WOMEN.—JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.—THE SEPULCHRE.

55. And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: 56. Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

Difference of sex makes none as to salvation. The weakest becomes the strongest, being fortified and animated by grace. God delights to give this to the weakest persons, and to leave the strongest to themselves, because he loves to make his power conspicuous in weakness. To attend at the death of Christ, and not to be afraid of the cross, is the reward of having followed, attended upon, and ministered unto him, in the time of his life.

57. When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: 58. He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.

A rare instance of fidelity and uncommon courage this, in a person who has much to lose, to expose himself thus to all hazards to serve Christ; and that, not while he is working miracles, but even when he is fastened to a cross. There is a time for a man to conceal himself, and a time to appear on the behalf of Christ and his truth. When all the world deserts it, then is the time to declare ourselves with the greater zeal on its side. Necessity is one mark of our being called to a good work, then, principally, when there is neither honour nor advantage to be expected from it on the part of men, and when there is nothing in nature but what tends to discourage us from it.

59. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60. And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

What objections would not human prudence have made to Joseph, had he consulted it on this occasion? It would have represented to him, that this was to expose himself, to bring himself into trouble, to render himself suspected, to put himself into an incapacity of ever doing any good, to ruin him-

self irrecoverably, etc. There is sometimes in our whole life but one single opportunity in which God designs to employ us, and we are for reserving ourselves for others, wherein he will have none of our service. We lose the grace of the first opportunity, and deserve to be deprived of it ever after. Happy that person who receives Jesus Christ into a new and clean heart, which has not been defiled by sin, and who takes care to secure the door thereof against the spirit of the world!

61. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

Assiduity in meditating on the death of Christ, is the proper employment of those who ardently love him. Death cannot extinguish a friendship formed by the Spirit of God, and newly cemented with the blood of Christ. The fidelity of faith consists in adhering firmly to Him whom we do not see; and this is the grace of these holy women. They learn, being near the sepulchre, to hide themselves from the world, and to be buried with Jesus Christ. It is always time to learn it with them.

SECT. VIII.—A WATCH SET AT THE SEPULCHRE.

62. ¶ Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, 63. Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

Let us adore Jesus Christ injured and persecuted, even in the grave, by those who ought to be the most holy. How many precautions are here taken to stifle the truth, to bury the memory of it, and to shut up all the avenues to faith; but how vain do they all prove against the designs of the divine wisdom! These men publish beforehand the mystery of the resurrection, by endeavouring to hinder the belief of it; and, by their own words, destroy their false accusation concerning the destruction of the temple, while they themselves declare the true meaning of the prophecy. So blind is human prudence!

64. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse

than the first. 65. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make *it* as sure as ye can.

The prudence of men is utterly ineffectual in opposition to God. He makes it, in spite of them, subservient to his designs: permitting them to anticipate their own calumnies, and to furnish arguments to refute themselves. Faith is the source of great repose and peace, through its docility and sincerity. An unbelieving person torments himself without end, that he may maintain himself in his incredulity.

66. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

The Jews, contrary to their own design, confirm the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and take pains only to render themselves inexcusable in their infidelity. Let the great pretenders to reason tell us, if they can, what precautions have been omitted to obviate all the pretences of incredulity. The testimony of the enemies of the church is the confirmation of her faith; and their false prudence the confutation of all the cavils of unbelievers.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SECT. I.—CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.—THE HOLY WOMEN AT THE SEPULCHRE.—THE ANGEL.

1. In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

Death and the grave cannot extinguish a true love toward God. God inspires Mary Magdalene with this holy haste and earnestness, because he designs to reward her with his first appearance. Her love of Jesus leads her to the cross and to the sepulchre; and his love of her brings her, by that means, to the joy of the resurrection. No person ever repents of having been faithful to God, and of having sought him betimes.

2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from

the door, and sat upon it. 3. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

The angels, the ministers of light, and the first evangelists of the resurrection, show, by the brightness of their countenance, and the whiteness of their raiment, the news which they come to declare. Would to God, that, after their example, all pastors and ecclesiastical persons would make the purity of the mysteries which they dispense, and the holiness of the truths which they preach, evident in their external behaviour! In order to rise to the life of grace, it is necessary to have the assistance of some visible angel of the Lord—one whose conversation is in heaven, who by a prudent condescension to the wants of sinners may be said to descend from thence, who may approach them by his charity, who may roll back the stone of their evil habits, and hinder them from shutting any more their hearts against grace.

4. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead *men*.

God can by one and the same means comfort his servants and terrify his enemies. Let us here contemplate an emblem or representation of the victory which Christ has just obtained over hell. This is a mystery of majesty and greatness amiable to God's children, and terrible to slaves.

5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

God gives consolation, and the spirit of the new-raised life to those who seek Jesus Christ crucified. To seek him thus, is to return to him by repentance,—not to refuse the cross when he presents it to us, not to quit the way of mortification how painful soever it may be to nature, to perform our duty notwithstanding all the contradictions of men, and not to turn aside from the way of the gospel through any fear of displeasing the world. This is a state which ought to afford us confidence, because it is that wherein self-love is least to be feared.

6. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Happy the sinner who is faithful to his promises, concerning whom one may say, "He is risen, as he said!" It is by

his heart, which was his sepulchre, that we are to judge of this; and it is by his works that we are to judge of his heart, and to assure ourselves that this sepulchre is become the mansion of the living Jesus.

7. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

Let us make haste to publish both Christ's resurrection and our own, by works of a new and restored life. What joy is it to a good pastor when a sinner tells him, by a life separated from the world and sin, that he is risen with Christ, and that he walks in the newness of his life! The first news of the resurrection, the first appearance of Jesus, and this mission to the apostles, are the recompense of the diligent attendance of Mary Magdalene and her companions at the cross and sepulchre. Let us attend there with her. Let us imitate her fidelity, if we desire to share in her grace.

SECT. II.—CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO THE WOMEN.—THE WATCH BRIBED.

8. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

Extraordinary communications of grace ought to give fear and joy at the same time. Heavenly visits, revelations, or apparitions, yield comfort to holy persons, and give them such an assurance of their truth, as yet hinders them not from fearing their own unworthiness and the danger of vanity, nor from submitting these graces to the examination of the pastors to whom God sends them back.

9. ¶ And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

Christ bestows his graces and consolations by degrees: first by his angels, and then by himself. He communicates not himself to incredulous and disobedient souls; he appears not even to these women, till he has tried their faith and obedience by his ministers. This kind reception and comfortable greeting used by Jesus after his resurrection, is the due recompense of the zeal of these persons, who were neither intimi-

dated by the rage of the Jews, nor discouraged by the death and burial of Christ. Whoever is so happy as to find Jesus Christ after having lost him, ought to embrace that which appears most abject in him, and to adore that which is highest.

10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

The incredulity of the disciples hinders not Christ from seeking, comforting, and showing himself to them. The love which he has for his flock makes him apply himself immediately to strengthen and support the pastors of it. The term, "My brethren," is suitable to the state and condition of Christ risen from the dead. These are words of hope, which denote that he looks on them as his coheirs in glory, that it is in that state that we shall bear his resemblance, and have God for our Father by the perfection of the Divine adoption, the absolute renunciation of Adam's family, and a full and complete union with the body of the Son of God. O Christian hope! O celestial inheritance! O brethren and jointheirs with Christ, about what do you amuse yourselves on earth?

11. ¶ Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. 12. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, 13. Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him *away* while we slept. 14. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

The Jews, disappointed in their designs, grow the more hardened, and crown their wickedness with a new crime. One sin naturally draws on another. How great is the misfortune for a man to have recourse to a lie to conceal his crime, rather than to repentance (to do what he can) to expiate it! He ought proportionably in other sins, to fear being detained by engagements, evil bashfulness, wilfulness, or obstinacy. How often do men pay dearly for the vanity of not seeming to be baffled in their undertakings!

15. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Avarice and the love of false riches have always persecuted

Jesus Christ,—the avarice of the Jewish priests during his life, that of an apostle at the time of his death, this of the soldiers after his resurrection, and that of wicked clergymen to the end of the world. The most ancient and most cruel persecutor of the church, is money in corrupt ecclesiastics and men of the sword. One single lie, one single calumny, may have dreadful consequences. A man is not less answerable for them because he did not think of them. How many Jews, on the credit of these priests and soldiers, have been lost, in not believing the resurrection of Christ!

SECT. III.—CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES.—HIS ALMIGHTY POWER AND CONTINUAL PRESENCE.

16. ¶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

Men are more ready to run to Jesus when risen from the dead, than to follow him when seized by his enemies, and to accompany him dying under ignominy. They are not very constant in attending at the foot of the cross; they never fail to seek all opportunities of joy and comfort. But these are not to be sought but only when obedience leads us to them, and when Christ himself goes before us in them, calls us to them, and vouchsafes to be present with us.

17. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

Worship ought always to accompany the sight which faith gives us of Jesus Christ and his mysteries. God permits doubts to arise for the greater confirmation of the faith. We must not suffer ourselves to be surprised or staggered at the doubtfulness and uncertainty of the greatest men, since there were some who doubted even among the apostles themselves.

18. ¶ And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a state of power, to which he was predestinated from all eternity, of which he de-

prived himself during his mortal life, and into the possession of which he entered by his resurrection. One fruit of this mystery is the new right and power which he received both in heaven and in earth: in heaven, to send the Holy Ghost from thence down on earth, to raise his members up thither, and to crown his saints there: in earth, to bring all nations into subjection to himself, to convert sinners, to sanctify, to protect, and perfect his church, to judge mankind, and to confine the devils and the reprobate in hell. The absolute power of Christ over the hearts of men to change them as he pleases, is the recompense of his labours, the fruit of his cross, the right of his new life, the principle of the new heart, and the comfort of sinners, as being the cause of the efficacy of his grace.

19. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Jesus Christ says to his apostles, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations," to show that he can convert them all, and that nothing can resist his almighty power when he intends to save sinners. The mission of the apostles throughout all the world, the calling of the Gentiles, the foundation of the church, and the purchase of his elect, are the effects of his new power, and the reward of his past sufferings. In baptism, the Christian is adopted by the Father, incorporated with the Son, animated by the Holy Ghost, and consecrated to this adorable and eternal mystery, to serve him in spirit and in truth by a life conformable to the gospel.

20. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

The faithfulness of a preacher consists in preaching nothing but what he has learned of Jesus Christ. His chief care must be, not to render himself unworthy of having Christ present with him in the exercise of his ministry. His confidence is, to be persuaded that he can do nothing of himself, but that Christ can do all in him; that he is able even of stones to raise up children unto Abraham; that it belongs to him to put

his law into the heart, and to perform whatever he has promised. Be thou therefore with us always, O Lord, to be our light, our strength, and our consolation. Be with thy church, to be her steadfastness, her protection, and her holiness. Amen.

THE

GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST,

ACCORDING TO

MARK.

CHAPTER I.

SECT. I.—THE PREACHING OF JOHN.

1. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;

The law of Jesus Christ alone is called *gospel*, that is to say, good news; because therein the incarnation of the Son of God, the birth of the expected Saviour, the remission of sins, the kingdom of charity, and the enjoyment of things eternal, are declared to us. What better news could we possibly expect? How hard soever some of the truths of the gospel may appear to us, yet that is always good news which it tells us, because it is the way of Christ and the means of salvation. It is the part of a pious man, at his first entrance on the gospel, to form an act of faith, extending to all the speculative and practical truths contained in it, and to beg of God the grace to read them with the same spirit with which they were written.

2. As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger* before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. [* *Fr.* Angel.]

John is the messenger or angel of God, his ambassador, apostle, and herald. Every one ought to have a visible angel to prepare the way for Jesus Christ in his heart by repentance. It is this alone which receives him; it is by this that we must go forth to meet him.

3. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.

A preacher should, if possible, be nothing but a voice, which should be always heard and never seen. To cry, is to preach with such force as is worthy of the truth, without falling the voice through complaisance. To this end, he must not be a man of the world, but one who comes, as it were, out of the wilderness, without relations, without friends, without secular engagements, which may thwart and obstruct his ministry. The first man who appears in the gospel is one entirely dedicated to repentance: the first example and the first precept are an example and a precept of repentance—so necessary is this to salvation!

4. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

A preacher, after St. John's example, must be sure not to quit the love of retirement and mortification, on pretence of undertaking the burden of preaching, and of other employments. The principal function and most usual business of a preacher, is to preach repentance, and to prepare souls for it. This is a baptism which is to begin with the casting off of sin, and the renouncing our evil inclinations; but it must not stop there. To enter into the water, is to enter upon the practice of works of atonement, such as are mortifying, and capable of allaying the heat of concupiscence, and of purifying our hearts from dead works.

5. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

The first step toward conversion, is to seek an enlightened guide. The second is, to open our hearts to him, by acquainting him with our manner of life. The third, to receive directions concerning repentance from him. The fourth, to baptize ourselves, as it were, by his advice, in tears and works of mortification. It is an instinct, and a duty which is, as it were, natural, for a man to confess his sins, and to humble himself for them, when once he is touched with a true contrition; but to do this is not at all natural to human

pride. Repentance is a pool, or rather a river, which carries our impurities far from us, so as never to be resumed again. Lord, thou art the only person who canst put us into it!

6. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey;

The fifth step toward conversion is, to observe a meanness, or at least modesty and humility, in our dress. The sixth is, to mortify the flesh. The seventh, to cut off all occasions of sin. The eighth, to employ ourselves in good works. The ninth, to avoid all niceness and superfluity in eating. And the tenth, to edify others by a good example.—In times of greatest corruption, God generally gives extraordinary examples of mortification, to awaken sinners and confound the slothfulness of sensual men. Every one in his way, and according to his capacity, should profit by such examples.

7. And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

It is one of the chief endeavours of an humble preacher, to raise himself out of the minds of men, and to imprint Jesus Christ therein. Humility is the sister of true repentance; they are inseparable, and mutually assist each other. To a real penitent, a truly humble person, nothing is more insupportable than to be esteemed. It is one of the pious artifices of such a person to apply the minds of men to some excellent subject, to the end that they may not take notice of himself. This is to be a gainer in all respects himself, and to make others so, to fix their minds intently on Christ.

8. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

The Spirit of God is a torrent which carries off all filthiness from the heart, and a fire which, inflaming it with his love, consumes all the impurities thereof. Jesus Christ alone possesses this Spirit entirely, merits it for us, and gives it to us. This water denotes the external works of repentance, of which Christ's grace and Spirit is the soul; and it is this Spirit which gives life, worth, and merit to those works. Grant, O Jesus, that the Spirit with which thou hast baptized

me may awake, and remain continually in me, and that it may animate all the actions of my life!

SECT. II.—THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.

9. ¶ And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.

Christ does not oblige John to come to Nazareth to administer his baptism to him; but he goes out of one province into another to find him, even to the place of his mission. He condemns beforehand the slothfulness of Christians, and the abuse which they make of domestic chapels, by sparing themselves the pains of going to the service and sacraments at the parish church, under pretence of distance or inconvenience. Ought any one to be ashamed to appear a sinner, and to take in the sight of the world the remedy, after that Christ has done the same, though he had no manner of occasion for it?

10. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: 11. And there came a voice from heaven, *saying*, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

He who is renewed by [the] baptism [of the Spirit] lives already in heaven, as being a citizen thereof by hope, which deceives him not; because charity is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given him, and because Jesus Christ dwells in him by faith, to which he is obedient in hearing the word of God. Alas! where can we find those who, since their baptism, have not shut heaven again by their sins, on whom the Spirit of divine adoption has continually remained, who have lived like children of God, and answered the love which he has manifested toward them? Phil. iii. 20; Rom. v. 5; Eph. iii. 17; Rom. i. 5.

12. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. 13. And he was there in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

Jesus, the victim of God, was prefigured by the goat of the legal expiation. Being loaded with the sins of the people in his baptism, he is driven into the wilderness, and exposed to the wild beasts, the Jews and Gentiles, to be torn

and devoured by them in his Passion. So profound a humiliation preaches to us a profound humility. When any man is tempted, either in retirement or in the world, he has need of a visible angel to minister unto him and direct him. We are never without temptation in this life: when, by means of abstinence, we have overcome that of the flesh, the devil causes new ones to spring up even out of this very victory. It is happy for us to be driven, with some kind of violence, into solitude by the Spirit of God, that we may avoid the temptation of the world; provided this Spirit accompany us, to fight in us, and to support us there: for solitude, as well as the world, has its peculiar temptations.

SECT. III.—THE PREACHING OF CHRIST.—THE CALLING OF PETER, ANDREW, JAMES, AND JOHN.

14. ¶ Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15. And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

The whole gospel is here reduced to repentance. Christ joins it to the hope of heaven, as being the only means of arriving there. Here are four points of the Son of God's preaching:—(1.) That his Father does every thing according to his adorable designs, in the time prefixed by his eternal predestination, and in the manner described in the Scriptures, prefigured in the shadows of the law, foretold by the prophets, and included in the promises, the time whereof is now fulfilled at his coming. (2.) That sin has reigned under the law, that God is to reign under grace and by it, and that the time of this kingdom of grace and mercy is at hand. (3.) That the kingdom of God, and his reign by grace, begins with repentance for past sins. (4.) That it is established by submission to the yoke of faith, and of the precepts of the gospel, and by the hope and love of eternal enjoyments which it reveals and promises.

16. Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

This temporary notice which Christ takes of these men, is

but a consequence of that eternal notice whereby God had predestinated them to the ministry, as well as to the belief of the gospel. This is an opportunity which chance seems to present, but which was regulated in the order of God's decrees. How different are the views of Christ, in the choice of the ministers of his kingdom, from those of earthly princes! It plainly appears that he himself is to do every thing therein, since he makes choice of such ministers.

17. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. 18. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. 19. And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets.

A necessary, quiet, and innocent employment attracts the eyes of God. To know what he requires of us is a beginning of grace. He does not promise a state of inactivity to those whom he calls; but the changing their mean, uncertain, and temporal labour into an employment heavenly and profitable, and which shall be crowned with an eternal reward. Christ here shows that the kingdom of God by grace begins in making himself obeyed without delay, without resistance, without the allurement of any sensible good, and even without being known. It is a great happiness to have but few things to leave. Great possessions are generally great obstacles to salvation, or at least to perfection.

20. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

It is a very great matter to be obedient and faithful to the first word which God speaks to us. It is most commonly the seed of abundance of graces. Let us admire this sudden progress of the kingdom of grace, which breaks the strongest ties of nature, separating even children from their father. The first instance of self-denial which Christ gives his ministers, in the calling of Peter and Andrew, is the forsaking all secular hopes and expectations, denoted here by nets; the second is the renouncing, like James and John, all sensual affection toward their kindred. A man finds no difficulty in following Jesus Christ everywhere, when he sits loose to every thing besides.

SECT. IV.—CHRIST'S POWER OVER DEVILS.

21. ¶ And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.

The teacher of humility begins his mission at a town where pride chiefly reigned. Preference is due from ministers to the greatest need, not to the greatest inclination. A minister should always begin by instructing, in imitation of God, who leads men not by a blind instinct, but by instruction and knowledge, by the external light of his word, and the internal light of his grace.

22. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

The word of Jesus Christ is full of a holy freedom, energy, and wisdom, and very remote from the flattery of the world. The freedom and sincerity of a preacher gain the hearts of the faithful, because these qualifications make it evident that he adheres to God alone, and seeks nothing but him. These things are admired because they are rare; but they persuade, only because God gives his Spirit to those who belong to him, and not to the world. How great is the difference between a declaimer, whose sole end is to please, and who trusts to his own eloquence, and a man of God, who labours to convert sinners, and entirely relies upon the divine assistance!

23. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 24. Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

The devil is not at all alarmed at the human endeavours of a worldly preacher; but he dreads every thing from a faithful minister who has the Spirit of God. The devil places his whole joy in possessing a soul with uncleanness. The lascivious cannot bear being spoken to, to repent and renounce their pleasures. Holiness has such a prevailing power, that it forces even those who are at the greatest distance from it to bear witness unto it. It makes even the devil himself sensible of it. God requires the voluntary testimony of a lively

and sincere faith, like that of Peter; not a forced and flattering confession, like this of the devil.

25. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

The devil, and the world, which follows his spirit, never praise but in order to seduce. It is a necessary part of prudence not to lay ourselves open to their commendations. The way to avoid their snares, is to have no more commerce with the world than what is absolutely necessary; and to use a holy severity toward it, which may oblige it to hold its peace. The sinner must be urged to leave off his sinful habits, without listening to its flatteries.

26. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

What violence, what convulsions does a man feel, when he is about to relinquish a habit of uncleanness, under which he has continued a long while! Happy is that person who knows at least how to renounce it betimes. When the temptations of the flesh are most violent in one who resolves to serve God, they are sometimes the last efforts of the devil, and the signs of the approaching deliverance of that soul. It is then that a man ought to redouble his prayer, to cry to God with all the strength of faith, and invoke his deliverer with the greater earnestness.

27. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine *is* this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

The holiness of a preacher goes a great way in recovering others from uncleanness. Every doctrine which seems new, has not for that reason the fault of profane novelty. Wo to those pastors who are the cause that the most pure maxims of the gospel pass for novelties, by their having corrupted the taste of Christians, either in accustoming them to remissness, or leaving them in ignorance! The spirit of repentance inspired into great sinners, and the conversion of the most obdurate, are the true commendation of a preacher. Such preachers as are fond of the world have reason to fear their

being subjected to the spirit of uncleanness which reigns therein, while those who have the Spirit of God, drive this spirit of the devil out of souls, and become masters of it.

28. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

A great reputation could not possibly hurt the Son of God; but it is a snare very dangerous for a preacher. There are few who fear it as they ought, fewer yet who shun and avoid it, but many whom it entices and insensibly corrupts.

SECT. V.—PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW.—THE DISEASED HEALED.

29. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

Jesus here teaches his ministers to avoid applause. He does not choose the house of some great person to repose and refresh himself in; the cottage of a poor fisherman is more grateful to him than a palace. What a large field of reflection is there here for those who never think any thing good enough for them, who never meet with conveniences enough!

30. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever; and anon they tell him of her.

Men ought to procure for the sick that assistance which they cannot give them themselves, and at least to pray for them. Jesus knew that there was somebody in this poor house who needed his help, which was a sufficient motive to draw him hither. The house of Peter and Andrew is the apostolic church, where all are tormented with the fever of sin, or suffer the assaults of concupiscence. This is the only house wherein prayers are successfully offered up for sinners, and where Jesus Christ heals them. Let us unalterably fix there. Christ sometimes waits for our prayers, on purpose to make way for that charity which prays to him, to teach us not to be too forward of ourselves in doing remarkable actions.

31. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

Happy that soul which the heavenly Physician comes to seek, which he touches with his grace, which he recovers from its weakness, its sloth, and all its evil habits! The acknow-

ledgment which he requires from it is to serve him. Good works, and, above all, those of gratitude toward God, and of charity toward the poor, ought to follow the cure of our souls. Concupiscence is the fever of the soul; charity is its health, and this is never idle.

32. ¶ And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. 33. And all the city was gathered together at the door. 34. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

Let us admire, adore, and imitate the extent of Christ's charity. The physicians of the soul ought never to refuse any labour which presents itself, nor accept the reward of vain applause. It is into the house of truth, charity, and unity, represented by this of Peter, that all sinners must be conducted. This house only has the Holy Ghost, the power over the evil spirit, and the true remedies for sin.

SECT. VI.—THE RETIREMENT, PRAYER, AND PREACHING OF CHRIST.

35. ¶ And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

It is good for a man sometimes to withdraw himself from business or labour, in order to converse with God alone. Prayer is so necessary to him who preaches and labours in the church, that far from dispensing with himself on this account, he ought to take a time for it out of that which belongs to rest and the other necessities of life, rather than be deficient therein.

36. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. 37. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All *men* seek for thee.

A minister of Jesus Christ ought to follow him as well in his retirement and prayer, as in his public life, when he diffuses his benefits and favours with lustre and figure. A preacher who has parts, finds but too many who come to tell him that all men seek, esteem, and applaud him; but the more they seek him, the more ought he to fly from them, as much as his ministry will permit. There are very few of this

profession who do not answer the offers and caresses of the world; and it is well if they do not anticipate and court them.

38. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. 39. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

A preacher, who is too much cried up and followed in the city, will imitate Christ if he withdraw himself from the crowd, and go to instruct the poor in the country: Jesus came for their sake. Men are too apt to imagine, that they have received their talents more for the sake of the rich than of the poor. They take it as an honour to preach in a village or an hospital, in order to make their court to some person of quality; but they are not very forward to go thither for the sake of the poor themselves, and to preach to them in a manner suited to their capacity. Men should, as it were, purchase and merit the grace to be serviceable in cities, and to the great, by leaving both now and then, and going to instruct the poor in the country without noise, lustre, ostentation, or interest.

SECT. VII.—THE LEPER.

40. ¶ And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

How loathsome and inveterate soever the leprosy of our sins may be, let us not be ashamed to go to Christ. Prayer, humiliation, and faith in him, as the source of all righteousness, are a triple band which ties up the justice of God, and draws down his mercy. There is nothing better than frequently to make this prayer; and to be always disposed in heart to do it, since there is always in us something which needs a cure.

41. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth *his* hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

Let us here learn, that the cure of our souls is the pure effect of the goodness and free mercy of God; that Jesus Christ performs it by a sovereign authority, ("put forth his hand;") that his sacred humanity is the instrument of the

divine operation in our hearts; and that it is by his will that his merits are applied to us. Fear, for he does not put forth his healing hand and touch all; hope, for he very frequently puts it forth and touches the most miserable.

42. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

God does whatever he pleases in the cure of the soul, as well as in that of the body; and the latter is an emblem of the former. When will it be, O Lord, that the leprosy of my pride shall disappear from before thy eyes? Hasten, if it please thee, that moment of thy mercy toward my heart!

43. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; 44. And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

Happy those who are in a condition to serve the church like angels, hiding themselves as much as possible! Whatever privileges a man has as to ecclesiastical functions, he must freely forget them, to give place to the ordinary power of the church. Whenever we receive any benefit from God, he must also receive somewhat in his turn from us, either by the hand of his ministers, or by that of the poor.

45. But he went out, and began to publish *it* much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

An excess of gratitude is a very pardonable fault. Whoever loves his own salvation, ought to take as much care to preserve humility as to exercise charity. God grants to his church many of those evangelical labourers, who may out of modesty decline their own reputation, and be obliged by the esteem of men to conceal themselves. A pastor or minister of the church ought always to be found, when there is a real need of him; but when nothing but praise and commendation is to be received, he ought to be invisible. The more he withdraws himself from the world, the more the world values him, and puts the greater confidence in him.

CHAPTER II.

SECT. I.—THE PARALYTIC.

1. And again he entered into Capernaum after *some* days; and it was noised that he was in the house. 2. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive *them*, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

The retirement of a preacher advances his reputation, and renders his labours more beneficial to those souls who seek him. This wonderful ardour and forwardness of the Jews to hear the word of God, condemns the lukewarmness of abundance of Christians. Men seldom hearken to it as the word of God, which it really is, because it is seldom preached to them in such a manner as is proper to make them believe that it is so. The faith of the preacher, and that of the hearer, ought mutually to support each other.

3. ¶ And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

God willingly accepts the desires, prayer, and good works which are offered for the conversion of sinners, who are not themselves sensible of their misery. Here is a representation of the universal charity of the church, which is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, which bears sinners in her bosom, and presents them continually to God by Jesus Christ. Every particular Christian ought to imitate the charity of the church, to be zealous for the conversion of sinners, and to bring them to Christ by prayer, good advice, good example, and by patience and mildness in supporting them. We are more culpable than we imagine, when we are deficient in point of charity, in neglecting to pray for those whom providence has made known to us, in not admonishing them of their faults, and in misguiding them, or treating them after a harsh and severe manner.

4. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they

uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken *it* up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

That is a holy and necessary violence which a man uses in order to approach Christ. Adorable judgment! He presents himself to some, and they reject him; others earnestly seek him, and scarce can they get near him, even by extraordinary means. Happy that person, for whom pious souls use so many charitable endeavours, that he is at last brought nigh to Christ! It is absolutely necessary to come nigh unto him some way or other, either by the door, or by the roof. Nothing should be able to hinder a man from doing it, because without him he is utterly lost.

5. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

God often defers to hear the prayers which are put up for the bodily health of a friend or relation, and gives that of the soul which was not asked for them. Sin is the source of all the infirmities of the body; it is the wound to which a remedy must be applied in the first place. God rewards the faith which makes us mindful of our neighbour, though it be not very clearly enlightened; and he rectifies it, by showing us, by the order of his gifts, that which ought to be asked first. Christ calls this sick man "son," to make us comprehend, (1.) That God is never more truly our Father, than when he confers spiritual graces upon us. (2.) That the physicians of the soul are fathers, and ought to have the heart and conduct of such.

6. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, 7. Why doth this *man* thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

The generality of mankind are more inclined to take an occasion of offence at their neighbour, than to be edified by the extraordinary virtues which he possesses, or the truths which he delivers. Divine truths serve only to set us at a greater distance from truth itself, when we do not receive them into an upright and sincere heart. From a principle whence they ought to conclude that Jesus Christ is God, they conclude that he is a blasphemer. So true is it, that one

cannot have a perfect knowledge in the business of salvation without being a good man.

8. And immediately, when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

A true pastoral charity bears with the weak and even the wicked, is not discouraged at the defects of the one or the malice of the other, applies itself to their cure, and reprehends, with a spirit of meekness, even those who sin out of envy. Admirable condescension, to bestow a new miracle on those whom so many others had only blinded! But dreadful judgment, if it serve only to blind them the more, instead of forcing them to confess that, since he knows the thoughts of the heart, he is God, and not a blasphemer! Inconceivable delusion of the sinner! to hide himself from man when he commits a sin, and not to fear the eyes of Him who sees the very secrets of the heart!

9. Whether is it easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, *Thy* sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

Nothing is more or less easy to him who can equally do all things; but by visible miracles he makes known those which are invisible. O indefatigable goodness of our Saviour! He works miracles upon miracles, to overcome the incredulity of his enemies; and yet pastors will not vouchsafe to clear the doubts of a soul full of faith, nor to support the weakness of a scrupulous conscience. The sole consolation of sinners is, that Jesus Christ can forgive their sins; and it is to assure them of this consolation that he establishes, by all sorts of ways, this fundamental truth.

10. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

If Jesus Christ in his mortal state had power to forgive sins, how great ought the confidence of a sinner to be in him now dead for sinners, glorious in heaven, and enjoying all his rights and all his power!

11. I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way unto thine house.

What is sin but a deplorable fall, a grovelling on the earth,

a repose in the creature, often followed by a universal palsy of the soul; namely, an utter inability to help itself, to break off its evil habits, to walk in the ways of God, to rise, or to take one good step toward him? Grace can repair all in a moment; because it is nothing else but the almighty will of God who commands, and does whatever he commands. When God will save a soul, the undoubted effect, always and everywhere, follows the will of God.

12. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Whence comes it that we less admire the conversion of the soul than the cure of the body, but only from the want of faith, and from the love of the present life, which makes us most intent and concerned about the latter? Amazement and admiration caused by miraculous works, and especially by those of grace, should not be barren and without fruit. The first fruit of it is, to glorify God for them, by adoring and thanking him. The second, to acknowledge how very different his conduct and works are from those of men. Perform in me, O Lord, that which thou didst in this sick person,—cure my palsy, my adhesion to the earth and the creatures, my faintness and sloth, and cause me to go toward thee!

SECT. II.—THE CALLING OF MATTHEW.—FASTING.—THE NEW CLOTH.—THE OLD VESSELS.

13. ¶ And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

That man neglects to improve his talent who takes no care to render the confidence placed in him by others, beneficial to their souls, by instructing them in their duty. Men never go to Christ without receiving some benefit; the visits made to him are always useful and advantageous. Such let those be which are made to pastors, who ought to have the law of God continually in their hearts, and on their tongues.

14. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the *son* of Alpheus sitting at

the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Such as sit at the receipt of customs are hard to be converted; but Jesus manifests his power by doing it with one word alone. Grace disengages Matthew from the love of money, to make him an apostle; the love of money will separate Judas from Christ, and make him an apostate: thus our blessed Saviour makes himself amends beforehand. Matthew's example had no influence on Judas, though perhaps it was Christ's design to lay it before his eyes. Let us profit by the one as well as the other; and let us, with fear and trembling, adore the different judgments of God in relation to souls!

15. ¶ And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many, and they followed him.

Jesus is sometimes found in a house or in a society which is full of disorderly people, for the sake of one single person who is faithful to him. This new disciple is not ashamed of his Master in the midst of this worldly and profane company; and Jesus himself is contented to stay in it with his disciples, to teach his ministers not to despise or disdain any. It is on the account of sinners that these are sent as well as he; such therefore they ought to seek. Every sinner converted to Christ must endeavour to conduct his friends to him. Fruitfulness is a certain proof of the reality of conversion.

16. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

How is it that he is crucified between thieves, will they one day say? Whoever has not charity, cannot possibly comprehend what it is capable of doing through a prudent condescension toward sinners, much less what it caused Christ to do and suffer for their salvation. It is proper only to Pharisees to take offence and be scandalized at the excess of humility and charity. This is one part of the scandal of the cross and death of Christ, at which the children of this world are

offended and take exception, while the children of light find in it their joy and their salvation.

17. When Jesus heard *it*, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

The more righteous we imagine ourselves, at so much the greater distance do we remove Christ from us. Let us by no means seek after false comforts, in flattering ourselves with an imaginary health and righteousness. That which alone is substantial and real, consists in our having in Jesus Christ a Physician for all our diseases, and the remission of all our sins. How dear to us ought this his quality of Physician to be, of which he informs us himself! If we are sensible of the need we have of it, let us not neglect often to adore him, to have recourse to him, and to place our whole confidence in the healing operation of his grace.

18. And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

The envious are more busied in censuring the conduct of others than in rectifying their own. This is one vice belonging to a Pharisee, and which is very common. It is another, to desire that every one should regulate his piety by ours, and embrace our particular customs and devotions. It is a third, to speak of others only that we may have an opportunity to speak of and to distinguish ourselves. It is very dangerous for a man to make himself remarkable by such devout practices as are external and singular, when he is not firmly settled and rooted in internal virtues, and, above all, in humility.

19. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

It is prudence not to overcharge those with outward performances who are as yet weak in piety, lest they be disgusted and discouraged: when their love becomes strong, it will make them do abundantly and with joy. It is piety to imi-

tate, by some degree of abstinence, at least, the primitive Christians, who fasted Wednesdays and Fridays, in remembrance of Christ's being sold and dying on those days; as the church did not fast at all in the forty days after Easter, in memory of the Bridegroom's continuing so long on earth with his church after his resurrection.

21. No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment; else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

Men often spoil all, for want of well considering the strength and ability of such souls as begin to serve God. The indiscreet zeal of a spiritual director, who requires too much of a penitent at first, often makes him give over all, and renders him the worse. It is a temptation to some beginners to be desirous of following the perfect in every thing. The devil seeks either to discourage them, or to puff them up. We must lay deep foundations of humility and the love of God, before we can possibly raise the building of perfection. Love will furnish us with all materials, and humility will preserve them.

22. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

Let us wait till God has strengthened the heart by the new spirit, ere we endeavour to fill it with the severer truths of the gospel. The mind of new penitents is often very forward, and full of a lively warmth, which makes them fancy themselves able to do every thing which they find themselves willing to do: but the flesh, notwithstanding, is weak and infirm. It is the duty of a wise pastor to use the latter tenderly, and to moderate the former. The means for a man to avoid relapses is, to fear his own weakness, and not to go too fast.

SECT. III.—THE EARS OF CORN PLUCKED.—THE OBSERVATION OF THE SABBATH.

23. ¶ And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.

Christ, in suffering hunger while his disciples eat, teaches

us that a master, a superior, or a spiritual director ought to be more perfect than his disciples. He never once wrought a miracle to feed himself or his disciples, though often in very great need, as he did to feed the people; on purpose to instruct them not to have recourse, on their own account, to extraordinary means, without an extreme necessity, and to be more sensibly affected with their neighbour's wants than with their own.

24. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?

He who has only the knowledge without the spirit of the law, very often opposes, while he thinks he defends it. Pharisaical pride makes men set themselves up for judges of every thing, and require an account of every thing to be given them. When a man is once full of himself, he decides confidently, especially when it is to condemn others. Those who love to domineer, are not content to exercise their authority upon their own disciples, but would fain bring those of others under their dominion.

25. And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was ahungered, he, and they that were with him? 26. How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?

Charity and necessity are superior to all positive laws. It is good to confound those who pretend to be masters in the divine law, when they are ignorant in it; and a man is so, when he is a stranger to charity, which is the soul thereof. The bread which is offered to God out of religion, is due to man by charity, when necessity makes known the will of God. He who daily feeds his creature, and allows him the use of all his good things, is far from desiring that he should perish. God teaches us to spare nothing when our neighbour is in necessity, by giving up (as one may say) to man even that which he reserves for himself.

27. And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:

The usages and ordinances of religion ought to be regulated

according to their end, which is the honour of God and the advantage of men. It is the property of the religion of the true God to contain nothing in it but what is beneficial to man. Hereby God plainly shows, that it is neither out of indigence, nor interest, that he requires men to worship and obey him, but only out of goodness, and on purpose to make them happy. God prohibited work on the sabbath-day, for fear lest servants should be oppressed by the hard-heartedness of their masters, and to the end that men might not be hindered from attending upon God and their own salvation.

28. Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

Man, on the account of self-preservation, may dispense with a law which God made for his benefit and advantage: with much greater reason, then, might Jesus Christ do it, being the God, the Saviour, and the sovereign dispenser both of the temporal happiness and eternal salvation of man. Let us always take great care to consider chiefly in laws the intention and design of the legislator. This is the way to understand their true meaning, and to do nothing contrary to the spirit of them.

CHAPTER III.

SECT. I.—THE WITHERED HAND.

1. And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.

Let us contemplate our own weakness in this emblem, which represents that total inability of doing good to which sin has reduced mankind. A withered hand, in the sight of God, and in the eyes of faith, is a covetous wretch, who bestows on the poor little or no alms at all; it is a lukewarm and negligent Christian, who performs no good works; it is a magistrate or person in authority, who takes no care to maintain order and justice; and it is a great man who abandons the innocent when oppressed. None but thou, O Lord, can heal

this withered hand, because its indisposition proceeds from the heart, and thou alone canst apply thy healing and almighty hand to that!

2. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him.

How many are there in the world, who will highly condemn an action which charity or necessity shall oblige a man to do upon a Lord's-day, while they themselves make no scruple of spending whole Sundays in taking the air, in diversions, in revelling, in evil-speaking, in vain conversations, or in profane or criminal correspondence!

3. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.

It is no other than to be ashamed of that which is good, and of God himself who commands it, not to do it publicly, when it is publicly blamed. We ought not to countenance either the ill-grounded scruples of the weak, or the passion of the envious, by abstaining from a good action which they do not approve, lest we confirm the ignorance of the one, and partake of the bad dispositions of the other. True charity fears not the ill-will of men, when the doing good to our neighbour is the thing in question.

4. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

The true sabbath consists in abstaining from evil and in doing good. Where sanctification and charity are, there is the Christian rest. There is a silence which proceeds from the Spirit of God. There is also a diabolical silence, which proceeds from the contest between pride and envy in a pharisaical heart. Would to God there were not to be found among Christians such as affect to be silent, through fear, either of passing for ignorant persons if they condemn the truth, or of justifying those they do not love, if they approve it!

5. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

This conduct, and these dispositions of Christ, ought to be

imitated by a wise director of souls. He ought, (1.) To have a holy indignation against those who, out of envy, oppose their own conversion. (2.) A real affliction of heart on the account of their blindness. (3.) A charitable and constant application to those whom God sends to him, notwithstanding all contradiction. (4.) He must incite them to lift up and stretch forth their hands toward God, in order to pray to him, toward the poor to relieve them, and toward their enemies to be reconciled to them. Stretch out thy hand, O Lord, over us, to bless, protect, conduct, heal, and sanctify us!

6. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

(5.) A wise director should have no apprehension at all of what he may suffer at the hands of the wicked, or of the pretenders to devotion, for having done his duty. That which ought to have engaged these Pharisees strictly to Christ, to have united them in one common design of becoming his disciples, and encouraged them to defend him, is the very thing which induces them to forsake him, to cabal against him, and to take a resolution of destroying him. My God! what is a heart which has resigned itself up to envy? It infects all things, and is infected by all; every thing provokes it, every thing conspires to complete its corruption and ruin; and even good itself contributes more thereto than evil.

SECT. II.—THE CONCOURSE OF PEOPLE.—THE CONFESSION OF THE DEVILS.

7. But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judea, 8. And from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and *from* beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him.

A spiritual director ought, (6.) Not to provoke the wicked by a fruitless opposition, but humbly and prudently to avoid their presence and their malice. If Jesus Christ is abandoned and persecuted by the wicked, yet a great multitude of pious souls earnestly seek and follow him. When a man labours for the sake of God, he always finds more than he loses in the midst of all contradiction. If the heart of a good pastor is

afflicted for the obduracy of some, God comforts and encourages him by the fervency and zeal of others. He is the savour of death to those whose heart is dead, and the savour of life to those whom God calls thereto.

9. And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. 10. For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues.

(7.) A spiritual director must not suffer himself to be so taken up with the external exercise of charity, as thereby to lose the recollection, humility, liberty, and peace of his mind. See here the admirable patience of Jesus! These people seek him with trust and confidence, but at the same time out of interest, and with importunity; yet he receives them all kindly and without the least uneasiness. How grateful would this violence be to him, if they sought him for the sake of their eternal salvation, and were so earnest to touch him out of a lively and pure faith! Charity never examines into the intentions, dispositions, or behaviour of men,—she opens her hand to all, and receives with gentleness the most importunate and troublesome.

11. And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. 12. And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.

(8.) A spiritual director ought to reject the praises of others. (9.) He should not have any conversation with scandalous and incorrigible sinners, but only in order to their salvation; neither should he enter into any society with them for works of piety. The humiliation of hypocrites is like that of the devil, their prayers the effect of a servile fear, and their confession a forced testimony. All this is abominable in the sight of him who requires the heart. The world is easily deceived in taking some expressions of religion and humiliation for conversion, which are only extorted from a reprobate's mouth by the fear of that Judge before whom he is going to appear.

SECT. III.—THE ELECTION OF THE APOSTLES.

13. ¶ And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth *unto him* whom he would: and they came unto him.

What talent soever a man may have, he ought not to undertake the ecclesiastical ministry without some assurance that it is God's will. This office is a state of perfection, a mountain which none must presume to ascend, without being called up. Jesus Christ goes up first himself, as being the sovereign Priest, the author and institutor of the Christian priesthood, the fountain of all sacerdotal power, and the principle of the spirit and holiness thereof: a man has no part therein, but only so far as he is associated and united to him.

14. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, 15. And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

Bishops and priests are called to the priesthood of Jesus Christ, (1.) In order to make but one priest with him, to extend, complete, and continue his priesthood upon earth. (2.) To preach his word, and make known his truth and his mysteries. All ecclesiastical functions are denoted by preaching, because this is a principal function of bishops and pastors, because it is by means of the word and of instruction that the kingdom of God is established, and because the word is likewise made use of in the representative sacrifice, the sacraments, and the other sacerdotal ministrations. (3.) To be the physicians of souls, and apply themselves to heal their diseases. (4.) To wage war with the devil, and destroy his kingdom. Whoever looks upon the sacerdotal state as a state of ease, and not of continual labour, understands but very little these words of Christ.

16. And Simon he surnamed Peter; 17. And James the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: 18. And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the *son* of Alpheus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanite,

The synagogue is a figure or emblem of the church; the Jewish people, that of the Christian; the twelve heads of the tribes, that of the twelve apostles; and the carnal promises,

that of the spiritual. It is for the completion of these promises, and in order to put the elect in possession of them, that the priesthood is instituted. And it is at first communicated to twelve, to show the twelve tribes which composed the Jewish church, that it is in Christ and his members that the kingdom expected by them was to be accomplished, and that the children of the church only are the children of promise.

19. And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into a house.

Terrible but adorable judgment of God, who sometimes calls to the priesthood one whom he knows will find therein the occasion of his damnation. One of the advantages which God draws from the perfidiousness of one of the twelve apostles, is, to prevent the scandal of wicked ministers in the church, at which the weak are apt to be troubled. Who will not admire his goodness, his wisdom, and his care in providing for the peace of souls?

SECT. VI.—CHRIST'S KINDRED.—THE BLASPHEMY OF THE PHARISEES.—THE DIVIDED KINGDOM.

20. ¶ And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.

We see very few of the wise and of the noble come in to Christ, but multitudes of the meaner sort of people, contemptible in the eyes of the world: this is to confound human wisdom, power, and grandeur. We must not set our heart upon these, if we desire to belong to God. Christ teaches his ministers, by his own example, to look upon themselves as the servants and slaves of souls, to wait their time, to think none inconvenient when it is to do them service, and to forget even the necessaries of life, when the harvest is great, and an opportunity which may irrecoverably be lost is now present.

21. And when his friends heard *of it*, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.

A man is never the better for being related to saints according to the flesh. Those whose piety makes them pass for madmen in the opinion of their friends and relations, ought to think it an honour to be treated like Jesus Christ. Let a

Christian but neglect the care of his body through the spirit of repentance, let a minister of Christ but impair his health by his pastoral labours, presently he is beside himself, he has not the least conduct or discretion. But let a man forget his soul, let him destroy his health by his debaucheries, let him expose his life out of ambition, and he may, notwithstanding, pass for a very wise and prudent person.

22. ¶ And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

He, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, is himself looked upon as a demoniac, and accused of being in confederacy with the devil! What a consolation is this for his most faithful servants, to whom the same crime is sometimes imputed! A minister of Christ, a teacher of the truth, who is too much afraid of being decried by calumnies, is as yet very far from resembling his Master. A man ought to be as careful of his reputation as possible, without neglecting his duty; but he must expose that as well as his life, when it is necessary.

23. And he called them *unto him*, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?

It is a mark of solid piety to be unconcerned under the greatest calamities, still to retain meekness and charity, and to instruct those who, either through ignorance or blindness, happen to join in them. They are very often made up of contradictions; but the confidence of those who raise them, and the malice or simplicity of those who hear them, supply all defects. Satan does neither calumniate, persecute, nor cast out Satan: and yet Christians do it to Christians, priests to priests, bishops to bishops, and even the creature to the Creator. The Creator suffers this with patience and humility; and is it reasonable that the creature should be exasperated, incensed, and unwilling to bear it?

24. And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

Division destroys the best works, as union establishes, preserves, and perfects them. The world will perish by means

of divisions, wars, and enmities; because it is designed to perish, and because God gives it up to the passions of carnal men. But divisions and schisms serve only to purify the church, to separate the chaff from the good grain, and to render the elect fit to form the body of unity, which is the church, and to enter into the eternal unity of God. The reason of this is, because his Spirit makes even division itself useful in fastening the bond of unity, and brings out of this darkness the light of peace. Effect this, O Lord, and effect it as soon as possible, according to thy decrees and will!

26. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.

How guilty then is he who divides the children of the church, by calumnies, dissensions, and jealousies! To divide the church is to endeavour to destroy it; but hereby a man can only destroy himself. Schism is an attempt against the unity of Christ's mystical body, which is the church; against the unity of his Spirit, which is the bond thereof; against the unity of Christ, who is the head of it; and against the unity of God himself, who is the principle, the pattern, and the perfection of all unity and society, by the unity of his essence, and the society of his persons.

SECT. V.—THE STRONG MAN ARMED.—THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.—CHRIST'S MOTHER AND BRETHREN.

27. No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.

There is an irreconcilable enmity between Christ and the devil, the church and hell, the Christian and the world, charity and concupiscence. The former of these two cannot be in any heart but only so far as the latter is therein suppressed. When the devil is once become master of a heart, none but Christ can drive him out, and destroy his power there. Enter, Lord, into this house, and destroy therein whatever remains of the spirit of that unjust usurper!

28. Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:

See here the extent of God's mercy toward men who sin either through ignorance or infirmity! The sinner is inexcusable if he neglect to have recourse to God, whatever sins he may have committed. A true penitent is never rejected: the spirit of repentance can procure him every thing from the divine mercy; since, as an earnest of this mercy, he has the word and oath of his Saviour, and the mercy itself of his God, which prevents him, by giving him this very spirit of repentance.

29. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: 30. Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

Who will not tremble, when he considers the rigour of the divine justice against such as sin out of mere malice? For a man, contrary to the light of his own mind, to attribute to the devil that which God performs by his servants, to oppose the known truth of God, and hold it in unrighteousness, are sins which are very seldom forgiven; because they either proceed from blindness and hardness of heart, or else produce both, and provoke God to deliver up those who are guilty of them to the errors of a depraved and corrupted mind. To call our blessed Saviour a demoniac, is to resolve to have no Saviour; not to acknowledge him in the fulness of that Spirit of which we must all receive in order to salvation, is to reject all forgiveness. Lord, it is thou alone who art my salvation; it is from thy Spirit alone that I expect my grace and my justification. Purify me, sanctify me, and save me!

31. ¶ There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him.

What priest is there who has not reason to apprehend that his relations, how holy soever they may be, will interrupt him, at least in the exercise of his ministry? The reservedness of the blessed Virgin is very admirable and instructive. Her tenderness toward her son is the cause of her coming; but her modesty, and the fear of interrupting him, hinder her from advancing any farther. Parents ought with great dis-

cretion to use the right they have over their sons who are labourers in the church. They properly belong no more to them, but to God and to Christ.

32. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. 33. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren?

It is better for a priest to seem to have too little tenderness for his relations, than to appear to have too much fondness for them. This outward indifference toward the best of mothers, is a great lesson for ecclesiastics, who are apt to be too fondly engaged to their parents by the ties of flesh and blood. On how many occasions do those who enjoy benefices show too great a regard both to their mothers and their brethren, enriching the latter at the blind desire of the former, and at the expense of the patrimony of the poor! Grant us, Lord, many pastors, ministers, and missionaries, who may be able to say in thy Spirit, "Who is my mother, or my brethren?"

34. And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! 35. For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

Nothing joins us more closely to Christ than the performing the will of God. He who does it to the end, contracts an eternal alliance with God as his Father, with Christ as his Brother, with angels and all the blessed spirits as his brethren and sisters, and with the heavenly Jerusalem as his mother. Whoever hears the word of God, with no other intent but to obey it, has already done the will of God in his heart. A beneficed person, who feeds the poor according to his duty, and is himself fed of their substance, in looking upon them ought to say, with joy on one account, and with gratitude on another, "Behold my mother and my brethren!"

CHAPTER IV.

SECT. I.—THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

1. And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

There are few besides the common sort of people who are not tired with hearing the word of God. He who chooses such a place as this to preach in, little values the rank and quality of his auditors; but then he finds among them more true lovers of God's word. The finest talent for preaching which ever appeared in the world was no doubt that of Christ; and yet he has only a bark for his pulpit, poor country peasants for his audience, and the sea shore for the place of assembly.

2. And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his* doctrine, [*Fr.* way of instructing.]

Christ, and those who speak by his Spirit, have a peculiar way of instructing, very different from that of the preachers of the world. Impart, Lord, this way of instructing to those whose business it is to feed thy people with thy word! Vouchsafe to send them, not vain declaimers, but charitable fathers, real teachers of Christian righteousness, faithful interpreters of thy law and thy doctrines, who may be always intent on instructing others, and not on making themselves admired!

3. Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: 4. And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

A pastor, a preacher, is a workman hired and sent out to sow the field of God; that is, to instruct souls in the truths of the gospel. This workman sins, (1.) When, instead of going to the field, he absents himself from it; nothing being more agreeable to natural and divine law than for a servant to obey his master, for a seedsman to be in the field for which he is hired, and whither he is sent to sow. He sins, (2.) When he stays in the field, but does not sow. (3.) When he

changes his master's seed, and sows bad instead of good. (4.) When he affects to cast it on the highway. Is not this what they do who love to preach only before those they call people of fashion, given up entirely to the vanity and other passions of the age, and very little disposed to profit by the divine word?

5. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: 6. But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root it withered away.

This workman sins, (5.) When he fixes on stony ground, from whence there is little hope of receiving any fruit. If interest, inclination, the spirit of amusement, or self-satisfaction determine a pastor to attend chiefly on such souls who seek not God, and whose virtue has no depth, he has but little regard to his Master's profit. Men ought not, indeed, to exclude any sort of ground, because Christ would have them preach to all, and because they do not know the heart; but then they ought not to choose and prefer one sort before another, for fear of being guilty of a criminal affection and respect of persons.

7. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

It is a (6th) defect, not to take care to pick out the stones, not to pluck up the thorns which are in the field. The sower complains of the barrenness of the field; and perhaps the field will complain, at the tribunal of God, of the negligence of the sower, in not preparing and cultivating it as he ought. How many ungrateful and barren fields are there! And who can say that his own heart is not such in respect of the divine seed?

8. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some a hundred.

A (7th) defect is, the not endeavouring to make the seed in the good ground yield fruit in proportion to its goodness. It is a very great degree of knowledge to discover the measure of grace conferred on every soul, to give them in proportion that application, instruction, and counsel which are proper

for them, to show them the way of perfection as far as their grace calls them, and to cause them to make all the use which they ought of the truths of the gospel. How few souls are there who are faithful, and bring forth all the fruit which they ought! How few perfect guides are there, who thoroughly understand the art of conducting souls in the ways of God!

9. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

He alone hears the gospel as he ought who puts it in practice; and no one can practise it unless Jesus Christ cause him to do it. Let all the world confess, that it is God who gives these ears of the heart, without which none can accomplish his law: to the end, that those who have received them may bless God for this free gift; and that those who have not may humble themselves, and have recourse to him in order to obtain them.

10. And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

God would have us address ourselves to him in order to understand the Scriptures; and it is for this very reason that they have some obscurity. It is likewise to subdue the pride of man by labour and study, to take off his disgust by variety, and to make him sensible, that to understand the language of God he stands in need of a light superior to reason. In our reading the Scripture, let us frequently ask his Spirit, and not trust to our own, which is but darkness.

11. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables:

Do we sufficiently prize this precious gift of faith and evangelical doctrine, and this preference on which our eternal happiness depends? Is our fidelity answerable thereto? Let us be very far from insulting them that are without; it is the mercy of God which alone makes us to differ; his light was no more due to us than to others, and it may be taken from us and given to them. The truths of the church appear to those who are without no other than unintelligible parables.

Let them but enter into the church, and its light will soon open their understanding and their heart.

12. That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them.

Terrible, but just and adorable, is this conduct of God toward those who have deserved to be left to themselves. This dereliction has several degrees. The first is, their being abandoned to their own darkness. The second, their not being able to understand the truths of salvation. The third, their not obeying them. The fourth, their remaining in their sins. And the fifth, their being condemned. God is pleased to give examples of this, to the end that the children of promise may know how much they owe to grace. It is a mistake to imagine, that whatever appears most severe and rigorous in the conduct of God ought to be concealed from Christians. He himself instructs us in it, on purpose that we should take great notice of it on proper occasions, and glorify him on the account of all the good we do, and of all the evil which we avoid.

13. And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

Jesus Christ is very careful to make his apostles sensible how incapable they naturally are of understanding the Scriptures and mysteries, to the end that they might not ascribe to themselves that knowledge of them which he should one day confer upon them. He here, by intimation, shows the extent of that knowledge of the Scriptures which the ministers of the gospel ought to have, in order to awaken their attention, to excite in them a desire to be instructed therein, and to make them apprehend how much they stand in need of him to this end.

14. ¶ The sower soweth the word.

The word of God is the seed of salvation. Had we, at the time of hearing the word preached, but this truth before our eyes, That it is the word of God, and that this word is the seed of salvation, could we possibly receive it with a faith so

weak and languishing, and a heart so little prepared? The minister sows nothing but the word; the invisible sower sows even the good-will itself, and causes the seed to spring up therein, and bring forth fruit.

15. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

It is very dangerous for a man to have once laid his heart open to the devil, by the love of the world, which is the high-way, and by a habit of sin; truth does not often find any more admittance there. Truth is no other than a trust; and we are persons intrusted with all those truths which are delivered to us. Whoever, through the love of the world and sin, permits this trust to be taken away from him, must give an account thereof proportionable to the sacredness of this word. Do thou thyself, O Lord, vouchsafe to preserve in me this depositum of evangelical truths; and to give me humility, which is the guardian of them!

16. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17. And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

Whoever has not the root of charity, has no other than a stony heart for the word of God. The brightness of truth may cause some joy and gladness for a time; but if grace be wanting, and a man must renounce the conveniences of life, then truth becomes odious, and is an occasion of sin. Those truths which should give us life, give us death, when the love of truth itself does not reign in our heart. Men ought to rejoice with humility at the knowledge of the truth. The weakness under which they find themselves, in times of trial and temptation, on the account of the truth, is often the punishment of that vain joy and ostentation with which they gloried in it.

18. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, 19. And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

When the word of God has caused some good desires to

spring up in the heart, they continue fruitless and without effect, if a man open it to the passions and lusts of the world. To profit by good desires, it is not sufficient that the heart be not hardened by sinful habits; it must also be in a condition to apply itself to divine things, and to make use of the means of salvation, prayer, reading, sacraments, etc. The world is full of people whose hearts seem to be open to every thing which is good, and shut against every sin; but they being likewise open to the things of the world, take their fill of them, and are lost. To open only the bodily ear to the word of God, is not properly to hear it; it is the ear of the heart which we must open to it; it is in obeying it that we must receive it.

20. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.

Those profit by the word who hear it with joy, retain it with fidelity, and practise it with zeal. The several degrees of bringing forth fruit here mentioned, denote as many several degrees of charity, as many different states of the Christian life, and as many employments or talents more or less profitable, more or less proper for piety, and more or less meritorious, (in God's account.) To bear a hundredfold for one is the state of perfection. It is a very great happiness to be called hereto, provided a man be faithful in observing every thing which the perfection of this state requires. Sometimes sixty is better than a hundred for some certain souls; for a middle state, all the duties whereof a man performs exactly, is, without comparison, surer than a more elevated one, where the fidelity does not rise in proportion to the height.

SECT. II.—THE CANDLE UNDER A BUSHEL.—HE WHO HATH SHALL HAVE MORE.

21. ¶ And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?

Truth will not be stifled. The knowledge of our duty must not be unprofitable, nor our talents without fruit. They must all be employed for the church. Let us bear witness to the

truth whenever there is occasion, and make our faith evident by our good works. This is the way whereby every one may set the candle on the candlestick. A man may hide from the world some good works; but a Christian life is a lamp which ought to be seen by everybody; a public testimony which we owe to our faith, and an example which the church requires of us.

22. For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.

The doctrine of Jesus Christ has nothing in it which fears the light; it is itself the light which must enlighten the world. It is the property of heretics and libertines to propagate their tenets in secret. Every thing is brought to light sooner or later. The humble person conceals his virtue in this life, but God will disclose it at the day of eternity. The hypocrite hides his wickedness here, but he shall suffer an eternal confusion for it in the sight of heaven and earth.

23. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

Whoever has the ears of concupiscence to hear the things of the world, and to fill his heart therewith, has not the ears of charity to understand the truths of salvation. He who has these, ought to humble himself, and return thanks for a preference which he by no means deserves. He who has them not as yet, ought to humble himself and pray, in confidence that Christ has merited them for him.

24. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given.

Whether God speak to us by the general truths of the gospel, or do it by opening our understanding and heart to some particular truth, it is both a respect due to him, and a thing necessary to our own salvation, to give good heed to that which he requires of us. If a man would not deceive himself, he must receive the truths and inspirations in their full extent, and not restrain them through fear of being obliged to do too much. The reward will be answerable to the fidelity: if we are sparing toward him, he will be so toward us. Let us love

and serve him without measure, who will give himself without measure to us. Let us do ever so much, there can be no manner of comparison between that which we do for God, and that which God prepares for us.

25. For he that hath, to him shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

The good use of knowledge and grace draws down more; the ill use leads to blindness and hardness of heart. The one is an effect of grace itself; the other, an effect of a depraved will. A faithful soul has a great treasure. The riches which it heaps up have scarce any bounds, because it puts none to its fidelity. A base and slothful soul grows poorer every day, until it is stripped of all. Who can tell the prodigious stock which is acquired by an evangelical labourer, a zealous missionary, who crosses the seas on purpose to seek souls whom he may convert, and is intent on nothing but the salvation of sinners! The greater his grace is, the more it increases by labour. Oh how happy and holy is this usury of a faithful soul!

SECT. III.—THE SEED CAST INTO THE GROUND.—THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

26. ¶ And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; 27. And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. 28. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

Christ himself cast the seed of the word from which his church sprung up, and he formed it himself after a conspicuous manner, by the preaching and miracles of the apostles, and by the blood of the martyrs of the first ages. He seemed, as it were, to sleep in the following ages, while it continued to grow up insensibly, during the night of adversity and the day of prosperity. How adorable is thy conduct, O my Saviour, in the establishment of thy kingdom; and how admirable are the secret operations of thy grace in those souls which thou formest for heaven! Grace has its different ages and gradual increase,—its growth is imperceptible. When a soul is once arrived at that measure of age and fulness, according to which

Christ is to be formed in it, then God withdraws it from the world.

29. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

As Jesus Christ himself cast the seed into the ground, so he will also himself reap the harvest at the general judgment. How fearful ought we to be, lest we should let the time of harvest come before that of our ripeness, death before the conversion of our hearts, and judgment before the performance of good works! How terrible will this voice be, The harvest is come to those who shall then be only in the blade, or in an imperfect ear! My God, vouchsafe to ripen thy fruit thyself; render me worthy to be of that good grain which is to be offered up to thee as the fruit of eternity!

30. ¶ And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

How amiable is this carefulness of the Son of God! How instructive to the ministers of his word! He is not solicitous in seeking fine turns of eloquence to charm the minds of his auditors, nor in drawing such representations, descriptions, or comparisons as may surprise them: he studies only to make himself understood, to instruct to advantage, to give true ideas of faith and piety, and to find out such expressions as may render necessary truths easy and intelligible to the meanest capacities. This is what must be imitated.

31. *It is* like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: 32. But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

That grace which in its beginning is the least, may be the greatest when it comes to its full growth: insomuch that he who has it will become superior even to those who were advanced the highest in perfection. Happy those souls who, being no longer scandalized at what appears low, imperfect, and contemptible in the church, now lodge under the shadow of it with the joy of faith! Extend, Lord, the branches of this plant, which thou hast watered with thy blood: let it fill the whole earth: let it gather under its shade those whom the

pride of error or the delusions of false pastors does yet keep at a distance from it!

33. And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear *it*.

A man must adapt himself to the capacity of those whom he instructs. He need not fear stooping too low, when he considers himself as the dispenser of the mysteries of abased wisdom. The gospel is more for the poor and simple than for the refined wits; and yet a minister thereof is sometimes, as one may say, afraid of being understood by the simple, lest he should not be admired by the learned.

34. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

The true disciples of the truth partake of her greatest secrets. Whenever she seems to hide herself, it is in order to humble those lofty spirits who are puffed up with their own knowledge; to make them sensible how much they stand in need of her illumination; to oblige her children to have recourse to her spirit; and to cause them to adore her judgments upon the one, and her mercy toward the other.

SECT. IV.—THE STORM APPEASED.

35. And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. 36. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. 37. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.

When a man walks with too much confidence, temptation rises on a sudden, and his heart would certainly be overwhelmed by it, if God did not stretch forth his hand to sustain it. By being in the ship, that is to say, in the church, with Christ and his apostles, we are not in a state of perfect safety, and secure from all temptations. The waves of heresy toss it from without; but the corruption of manners within, like the water which beat into this ship, puts it in much greater danger of perishing. This corrupt water shall be cast out, and the ship will then arrive safe in the harbour.

38. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow:

and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?

If Jesus Christ seem to be asleep in times of persecution or temptation, it is only to oblige us to apply ourselves to him, and to lay before him our danger with fervency and confidence. Jesus sleeps, indeed, but his heart continually watches over his disciples and his church. When the church is in great straits he expects to be awakened, that is, invoked with the loud cries of charity, and the importunity of prayer. It is to the prayers and groans of the church that he vouchsafes to grant peace and a calm. Nothing is more grateful to him than this complaint of his true disciples and of holy bishops, which shows their concern for the church, their compassion on its evils, and their confidence in him.

39. And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

When passions the most violent, temptations the most dangerous, and the dread of the greatest evils, put our hearts in the most perilous condition, why do we not fly to Him whose almighty will can quiet and allay all in a moment? The true idea of grace is this—God wills our obedience, and he is obeyed; he commands, and every thing is done; he speaks with authority, and all things are subject to him. O Jesus, the only refuge of those who are tempted, the strength of the weak, and the sole hope of thy church, thou seest its afflictions, its troubles, and all its wants: pronounce but over it this word of peace which calms all in an instant, and peace will immediately be restored to it!

40. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

After a temptation is overcome, let every one consider whether he has not reason, (1.) To reproach himself for his want of trust and confidence. (2.) To condemn the cause of it, which, perhaps, was want of faith. God is so good that he despises not a faith as yet weak, refuses not imperfect prayers, nor rejects and discourages a heart which is too fearful. What faith, what confidence should we not have, did we

but take care to reflect on God's conduct toward his elect in all ages, and his judgments upon their enemies!

41. And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

(3.) We must, in the next place, after a victory over temptation, with fear and trembling consider the danger out of which we have been delivered by Jesus Christ. (4.) We must retain the dread of it in our hearts. (5.) We must willingly entertain one another with the mercies we have received from God. (6.) We must adore his power and his goodness. How comfortable and edifying would it be to see Christians thus entertain one another, in their conversations, with the majesty and wonderful works of God, with the sovereign power of Christ over the heart, and with the admirable examples of obedience, submission, and inviolable adherence to his will, wrought by his Spirit both in sinners and in saints! God's power over insensible beings is set before us in the gospel, as no more than an emblem or representation of that which he exercises over rational creatures. Nothing is of greater importance than to be thoroughly convinced of this, which is the ground and foundation of our confidence.

CHAPTER V.

SECT. I.—THE LEGION OF DEVILS CAST OUT.—THE SWINE DROWNED.

1. And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. 2. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

Hell is a tomb out of which the unclean spirit will continually come forth, until the judgment of God shall shut him up therein. The heart of an unchaste man is a noisome sepulchre, in which he is himself buried, and wherein there is nothing but corruption and rottenness. A criminal beauty is a whited sepulchre, which insensibly defiles and infects those who continue near it. No sin so entirely possesses the whole

heart as that of uncleanness: none more nearly resembles the possession of the devil. The first step toward a deliverance from it, is for a man to present himself before Jesus: but how exceeding difficult is it for him to come out of his grave, to present him to the light, there to lay open a heart full of the most shameful crime, and to raise a soul which is become altogether earthy, up to Him who is purity itself! This is the work of thy grace, O my God! Cause the power of it to shine forth in the destruction of this vice, so contagious and fatal!

3. Who had *his* dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

An inveterate habit of uncleanness frequently extinguishes all the principles of the Christian life; and an unchaste soul dwells in its body as in a loathsome sepulchre, where there is nothing but the remains of worms and corruption. This is but too often literally true. An unchaste person is a madman, whom every thing provokes, whom nothing stops, and who will not bear the least restraint.

4. Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any *man* tame him.

Natural physic is by no means capable of curing an unchaste person,—a heavenly Physician must be employed. We may, indeed, remove from him the occasions of his sin, or bind him hand and foot; but nothing but the Spirit of God alone can make itself absolute master of the heart wherein lust reigns. Were this violent passion no more than a chain of iron, another person might be able to manage it; but as it is, nothing but the Spirit and will of God can break this chain of flesh and blood, which the unchaste man has made for himself of his depraved will.

5. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

This passion renders a man brutish, robs him of his rest by night, gives him a continual uneasiness all the day, carries him into the excesses of rage and fury, and drives him even into contrary extremes. How heavy and insupportable is the

yoke of sin! How cruel a tyrant is the love of the creatures! There is no pleasure but in bearing the amiable yoke of thy law, O my God; there is no true rest to be found but only in thy love.

6. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, 7. And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

At how great a distance soever from salvation an obstinate sinner may be, yet when Jesus once shows himself to him by the saving light of his grace, which illuminates the understanding and gains the heart, he must of necessity submit, he must run, he must humble himself, and adore his Saviour. A man can never leave sin without violence; he can never root up an evil habit but nature must suffer deeply. She fights against grace; she causes the flesh to strive against the Spirit, and will against will. Whoever loves impurity dreads to be delivered from it, and omits nothing to continue himself under that miserable possession.

8. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, *thou* unclean spirit.

Jesus cannot suffer the spirit of uncleanness in his presence. One word alone of his, that is to say, one grace of our blessed Saviour, decides the combat between the two men, and renders the new man victorious. No unclean spirit whatever can hold out against the Holy Spirit; no rebellious will can be disobedient to the will of God, when he commands as God. Command, Lord, this unclean spirit, which reigns in the world and in the sinner, and both the world and the sinner will immediately change their nature!

9. And he asked him, What *is* thy name? And he answered, saying, My name *is* Legion: for we are many.

Uncleanness is rather a multitude of vices than one particular sin. It does not belong to all persons to discourse with the unclean spirit; none but the Holy One of God can do it without danger of being infected thereby. He speaks to him with the authority of a judge, and the church does so in his name, because he has given her power to judge the world, and the prince of the world. The sin of uncleanness is very

rarely without accomplices. It is the duty of a spiritual guide to examine sinners upon this point with prudence and caution.

10. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

The devil takes delight in the souls which he has for a long time possessed. It is a very dangerous illusion, not to break with this sin entirely and without reserve. To be willing to enter into a sort of composition with lust, and not to fly all the occasions of it, is to be willing to settle in the very region and country of sin. He deceives himself who pretends that an impure love will ever be changed into an honest and innocent familiarity. The devil is not much concerned, provided he can but maintain some small correspondence with a heart out of which he has been driven.

11. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. 12. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

How many are there in the world, who, after the example of these devils, abstain from one sin only in order to commit another! If we do not examine ourselves thoroughly, we shall easily mistake vices for virtues. We may change the object without changing the sinful desire. There is no other way to turn concupiscence into charity, but only by restoring God to his proper place, which has been usurped by the creature. The devil has no power to hurt man, or any thing belonging to him, without God's permission. Being only the instrument of his justice, he executes nothing but by the order of Christ the sovereign Judge. It is a certain sign of want of faith and trust in God, for a man to fear the devil, any otherwise than as his slave and as the executioner of his justice.

13. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand,) and were choked in the sea.

God often grants to the wicked, through a motive infinitely holy, that which they ask for a criminal end. He makes use of the devil, either to punish sin or to exercise virtue; and,

both in the one and the other, he makes him against his will subservient to his glory. When the devil cannot hurt men in their persons, he endeavours to do it in their goods. But when he thinks he hurts a Christian most, then it is that he is sometimes most instrumental in promoting his salvation, either in curing his avarice by the loss of his goods, or in taking away his health which he abused against God, or in removing him from the occasions of sin, or in purifying him from his imperfections and faults.

14. And they that fed the swine fled, and told *it* in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. 15. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

When a man is delivered from his evil habits, then only he possesses his soul in peace, and is free indeed. If an instance of some extraordinary conversion serve only to excite fear and trouble in a soul by reason of some temporal interest, it is little disposed to receive any spiritual advantage thereby. In order to this, a man must worship God, enter into himself, examine his own heart, and have recourse to God with peace and tranquillity of mind; it is thus that he ought to answer his designs.

16. And they that saw *it* told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and *also* concerning the swine. 17. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.

Whoever loves earthly possessions and enjoyments, will not long preserve Christ in his heart. Alas, there are but too many who strive to part with Christ by parting with the faith by which he dwells in them, and which does not well agree with their passions! The carnal man shakes with fear, when he considers that grace has prevailed with some souls to divest themselves of all things. He dreads that grace which leaves a man nothing but his God; but how miserable is the heart to which its God is not sufficient!

18. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.

When a man is in a public station, he ought to be very cautious of taking into his house, or admitting to the sacred

ministry, persons who, before their conversion, have led a very scandalous life. A penitent should resolve to follow Christ in his humiliations, to imitate him in the sacrifice of Christian virtues, and to adhere to him by a sincere acknowledgment, and by all the ties of religion; but he must not think of aspiring to that state which belongs only to the innocent.

19. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.

God sometimes requires of a person newly converted nothing but a grateful acknowledgment of heart, and a good example in his family, by a regular life and conversation. A great measure of grace, received by us in order to our own sanctification, ought sometimes also to be made instrumental toward that of others. The grace of conversion is a talent which a man ought to improve to the utmost, in making known the majesty of God, the inexhaustible riches of his mercy, and the power of his grace. One cannot better set forth his goodness than by openly making a very great acknowledgment of his benefits.

20. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him:* and all *men* did marvel. [* *Fr.* The great graces he had received of Jesus.]

A thankful heart can very difficultly confine itself within the narrow bounds of gratitude prescribed to it. There are some graces which are proper to be published; and there are others which ought to be concealed. It is just to publish those, which, being preceded by heinous sins, cannot be ascribed to any thing but the pure mercy of God, and which are visibly counterbalanced by our demerits. It is the safer way to conceal such as may be looked on as the reward of great fidelity, in making a good use of those which a man has received before. The glory of God, and the advantage of our neighbour, are the rules to be observed on this occasion. He who does not publish them of his own accord, when they are extraordinary in their kind, and the example may be dangerous to the weak, shelters his neighbour's weakness under the veil of silence, and his own under that of obedience.

SECT. II.—THE BLOODY ISSUE HEALED.—THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS RAISED.

21. And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him; and he was nigh unto the sea. 22. And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, 23. And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: *I pray thee,* come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. 24. And *Jesus* went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him.

We pray with earnestness for a person whose soul is ready to quit the body; and we look with indifference upon a soul which is on the point of losing its God. Let us judge by this father's grief, what that of a spiritual father full of charity must needs be, when he sees a soul which is committed to his care in danger of falling! Who can tell with how much humility, fervency, and importunity he solicits for grace at the feet of Christ for that soul? Happy the daughter who has found such a father! happy the father, exact and faithful in his duty, who has the bowels of Christ toward those souls whose infirmities and miseries he fully knows!

25. And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years,

Jairus is an emblem of the Jewish people, for whom Christ came in the first place, but who are not to be saved till after the Gentiles, of whom this woman is a type or figure, both by the nature of her distemper, and by the preference which she receives. God has his proper times and moments. He seems to neglect a sinner, and not to hear his prayer; but very often he only defers it. The secret is, to have patience, and not to give over following him in his ways.

26. And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,

It is a great piece of infidelity for men not to think of God in afflictions until they have experienced the insufficiency of human remedies. What a mercy is it to be forced to have recourse to God, by misfortunes, diseases, or the ill usage of men! See here a representation of those physicians of souls, who, not acting in the name and in the spirit of Christ, do

nothing else but feed and increase their maladies. Men are very far from doing as much for the health of the soul as for that of the body, and from giving all for eternal salvation, as they willingly spend all they have for temporal life. They are apt to seek out such physicians from whom they may suffer little or nothing, such as are likely to be most easy and gentle; and scarce will they hear speak of bestowing some slight alms. What wonder, then, if such persons are nothing bettered, but rather grow worse!

27. When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment.

The Gentiles, represented by this woman, passing as it were through the crowd of the Jewish people, approach Christ, and believe in him. A sinner oftentimes, by means of his faith, receives a grace which seemed to be designed for a just person. To touch the garment of Christ, is to believe that he clothed himself with our flesh for our sakes; it is to unite ourselves to him by a lively faith, to put our trust and confidence in the merits of his mortal life, to apply ourselves to the mysteries accomplished in his flesh, and to imitate the mortification which he himself underwent therein. Alas, we are unwilling to touch this with one of our fingers!

28. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.

In the mysteries of Jesus Christ we find a sovereign remedy against the diseases which have taken the deepest root in the soul. Every thing is holy, efficacious, and full of a divine virtue in the Mediator of our peace; every thing is saving in the Author of salvation. How oft do we touch, receive, and eat his representative body in the eucharist; and yet, through our own fault, we continue still subject to the same infirmities! It is because we do not approach him as this woman did; with the same faith, the same confidence, and the same humility.

29. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of that plague.

The grace of Christ is the only remedy for all the most inveterate diseases of the soul. This will dry up the very fountain itself of sin, which is concupiscence, when the time of the

perfect reign of charity shall come. It at present stops the course, the reign, and the dominion of concupiscence. The healing operation of grace alone can do all in a moment; the delays of it do not proceed from inability and necessity, but from dispensation and wisdom. When will it be, O my Saviour, that it shall drain in me the source of all sin, that it shall dry up that fountain of corruption and iniquity which I carry in my flesh and in my heart?

30. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?

The Gentiles belong to Christ, and received his grace, as it were contrary to his design and first intention. There are graces which are gotten, as it were by stealth, and which may be called surreptitious graces: so surprising do they appear, and contrary to the ordinary conduct of God. If any thing were capable of surprising wisdom itself, it would be a faith which is humble and full of confidence at the same time. What part soever of Christ such a faith touches, on whatever it lays hold in order to go to him, he is sensible thereof, and suffers himself to be gained thereby.

31. And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? 32. And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing.

Jesus Christ takes more notice of a soul which seeks him in silence, in the spirit of faith, and by humble and secret ways, than of a multitude of common Christians, who do nothing but through custom, and in the way of external devotion. He seeks those in his turn who have sought him, and who could not have done it but by his grace; that is to say, second graces crown the first. He hides the operations of his grace under appearances altogether human, because this is the time to establish the belief of it, not to unfold its mysteries, and to manifest its glory.

33. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.

A timorous humility and a perfect thankfulness raise sometimes an innocent contention in a soul. There is a confidence

arising from pride, which blinds men, and makes them take defects for virtues. There is a diffidence proceeding from humility, which hides their virtues from them, and makes them sometimes take them for defects. It is a sight very pleasing to Christ, to see a soul humbled at his feet, whose only crime is excess of faith and greatness of confidence.

34. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.

The time of comfort succeeds that of pain and trouble. It is to humility and faith that God gives this comfort. What joy must it be to a soul which believed itself wanting in its duty, to understand that its fidelity has not received the least blemish, and that it has been conducted in every thing by its faith! The word of Jesus Christ sometimes confounds and humbles souls; sometimes it comforts and raises them from their dejection. This word, and a spiritual guide or director who has been well nourished therewith, (1.) Make men sensible that the reason why they are exercised and humbled is because they are children of God. (2.) Teach them to distinguish that which proceeds from faith from that which does not. (3.) Restore to them peace of mind, and calm the troubles of conscience. (4.) Confirm them in virtue, and in a full persuasion and confidence of the good state of their hearts.

35. While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's *house certain* which said, Thy daughter is dead; why troublest thou the Master any further?

Thus it happens sometimes, that a ghostly father hears of the [spiritual] death of a soul which he loved entirely, and for which he had grieved a long time. God permits this, in order to the humiliation both of this soul and of this father, and that, perhaps, to cure both the one and the other of their too great fondness and affection. He must be sure not to abandon it in these circumstances, nor to give admission to such thoughts as are merely human, and produce nothing but vexation, discouragement, and despair. He must, on the contrary, pray with greater earnestness, and with new sighs

importune Him who is the absolute master of the heart, and the author of salvation.

36. As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.

It often happens that when faith has brought a sinner as it were to the very point of a perfect conversion, this faith suffers greater shocks than ever by thoughts of distrust and despair. A wise director of the conscience ought to dispel these by fortifying his faith, and making known to him the goodness of God, and the power of the grace of Christ. At first Christ spoke not one word to this afflicted father, gave him no manner of hopes, seemed entirely to neglect him, and applied himself to the cure of another diseased person; but as soon as he perceives his trust and confidence assaulted, he then speaks to him. God will be entreated a long time in behalf of a soul, and suffers it sometimes to fall, in order to make the power of his grace more evident and illustrious.

37. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James.

Let us thus learn from Christ, not to impart, except only to a few chosen persons, those works of God which we are to undertake, for fear lest they should be obstructed. The Spirit of God would have us labour in secret as much as possible; whereas the spirit of the world continually affects noise and applause.

38. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. 39. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.

The death of sin in the elect is nothing but a sleep, because they will infallibly awake from it. It is not in the midst of the noise and confusion of the world that a man should endeavour to raise his own soul or that of his neighbour, but in retirement and silence. Men are often apt to make too much ado about the fall of a soul. They defame it, they discourse of it with a sort of grief which is too human, loud, and sometimes despairing, or else from motives not very charitable or Christian, and which often proceed from interest. One should

perhaps very much puzzle these mourners, if one obliged them to answer this "Why," and to discover what passes in their heart upon the death of their friends or relations, or upon the disgraces and falls of their neighbour. It is good to put this question to ourselves.

40. And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.

The world laughs those to scorn who hope every thing from the goodness and grace of God: the reason is, because it has no faith at all. A man must as much contemn the infidelity of the world, and perform his duty. How desperate soever the condition of a sinner may appear, we must neither insult over it nor despair of his conversion. Perhaps he is one of God's elect, in whom he will make the power of his grace evidently appear by raising him up. In order to this, he must enter into the very place where he is dead, namely, into his heart. Those who have been witnesses of the disorders which bring death on the soul, ought likewise to be so of its conversion.

41. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, (I say unto thee,) arise.

If God vouchsafe not to take our heart in his hand, it will never recover from its sin. The sacred humanity is, as it were, the hand and instrument of the Divinity, to which it is united in the person of the Word. It is from this humanity that our life proceeds, because it was in this that Christ died and rose again, and completed his sacrifice. He is man, since he takes this dead person by the hand; he is God, since he commands her to live and to arise, and is immediately obeyed.

42. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was *of the age* of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. 43. And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.

None but God can make his voice heard by a soul which is in sin, because it is as great a miracle as to make a dead man hear it. Observe here the order of conversion:—(1.) To rise, by forsaking sin, its habits and occasions. (2.) To walk

a long time in good works. (3.) To retire from the world, and to keep silence for some time. (4.) To eat the living bread of the eucharist. One ought to take great care not to give this bread to a dead person. That which ought to precede this divine food, according to the order here intimated by Christ, is, that a man should rise, leave the bed wherein he was dead, and walk in the practice of virtue with such edification as even to cause admiration in those whom he has before offended and scandalized by his sins.

CHAPTER VI.

SECT. I.—CHRIST CONTEMNED.—NO PROPHET HONOURED IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.

1. And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.

Christ did not begin his preaching in his own country, and it was late before he preached there at all; and this in order to teach priests to have little regard to human and natural affections.

2. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing *him* were astonished, saying, From whence hath this *man* these things? and what wisdom *is* this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?

It is common for men, when they would elude the force of a sermon, to fall upon the preacher. They lose the benefit of useful and practical truths, by fixing on nice questions which have no relation to manners. How can these men own the miracles of Christ, and yet pretend to be ignorant from whence he has his doctrine? Is not this wilfully to shut their eyes, that they may not believe? Worldly-minded men cannot choose but admire a truly Christian preacher; but they always find pretences enough for not submitting to what he delivers.

3. Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James,

and Joses, and of Judas, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

he world cannot esteem that which proceeds not from it. False wisdom is blind, and is an obstacle to the true. The humble condition of Jesus Christ is an occasion of offence and falling to many. It seems to be unworthy of him, but it was necessary on our account: and he chooses rather to be wanting to his greatness than to his love. Men ought to bring along with them to sermons their ears and their heart, in order to hear the word of God, to receive, to love, and to retain it; but not their eyes, that they may not be offended at the external and apparent defects of the preacher. Let us cautiously avoid the common error of affixing the gifts of God to the outward advantages of nature or fortune. This is a delusion of the world, worthy of its infidelity.

4. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.

The fond adherence of a priest or a preacher to his own kindred and house renders him very little serviceable in the exercise of his ministry. If he have faults, they are known there, and he becomes contemptible; if he have great talents, they excite envy, and he is opposed; if he make himself familiar, he loses respect, and his authority suffers thereby; if he do not, he is counted proud, and avoided. The property of an evangelical minister is to be, as it were, another Melchisedek—without country, without house, without relations, or to be as if he had none.

5. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed *them*.

Ingratitude, joined with incredulity, ties, as it were, the hands of the divine goodness. The only revenge which the gospel allows us, is to overcome evil with good. The infidelity of a whole people does not hinder the mercy of God from extending itself over the small number of elect who are mingled with them.

6. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.

Jesus wonders at that at which he would have us wonder;

and he takes notice of our faults, to the end that we may reflect upon ourselves. How much more strange and surprising are our own infidelity or unsuitable returns, after the instruction of so many ages!

SECT. II.—THE MISSION AND POWER OF THE APOSTLES.

7. ¶ And he called *unto him* the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;

Union and good understanding between the ministers of the gospel is necessary to the progress and advancement of it. Christ shows this in sending them forth by two and two. The end and business of the ministry is to destroy the kingdom of the devil in the world. Judas received power and authority over him as well as the rest of the apostles: but of what advantage is it for a man to cast him out of the body of his brother, if he open his own heart, and through avarice surrender himself up to him, as Judas did?

8. And commanded them that they should take nothing for *their* journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in *their* purse: 9. But *be* shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. 10. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into a house, there abide till ye depart from that place.

The ecclesiastical ministry requires a perfect disengagement from temporal things, to take away from the people all suspicion that the clergy act only out of self-interest. Ambition and avarice are the two things which frequently ruin a preacher and all his labours. There are very few examples now-a-days of this perfect indifference as to worldly things, which Christ here enjoins on the apostles. A man is not obliged to serve the church by actually depriving himself of all things; but whoever is not ready to be deprived of all, rather than be wanting to his duty, is not worthy to succeed the apostles.

11. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.

The greater the labours of ecclesiastical ministers have been, the more will they condemn those who have not pro-

fited thereby. One of the greatest punishments of their neglect is, that the word of God shall be taken from them. If men have reason to fear being deprived of the truth, when they despise its ministers and neglect to hear them, what judgment of God will fall upon those who persecute them! Jesus Christ neither enjoins nor permits his apostles to employ their apostolical power to avenge themselves, nor even to desire that he should do it. It is the part of a minister of truth and charity to labour without ceasing, to suffer without resentment, and to leave his cause to God, with a full trust and confidence in him.

12. And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and his apostles, both before and after his death, always began their preaching with the subject of repentance, so great is the necessity of this duty. Those who do not preach it, who weaken the obligation and decry the practice thereof, follow very little the footsteps of the apostles or of Jesus Christ. Awaken the spirit of repentance, O my God, in this age, which has so great need of it, and vouchsafe to give true preachers thereof to thy church!

13. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed *them*.

Here is an emblem of the several duties of a pastor: namely, courageously to prosecute incorrigible sinners, to treat the weak with mildness, and to apply himself to all with zeal.

SECT. III.—THE IMPRISONMENT AND DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

14. And king Herod heard *of him;* (for his name was spread abroad;) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

The very memory of just men who have been oppressed, torments their persecutors. The sinner has no peace when he desires to have it, because he rejected it when God was pleased to offer it to him. Strange condition this, for a man to be forced to bear witness to the innocence of a saint whom

he has oppressed! This is only a fruitless confession, extorted from the mouth of a criminal, not a profitable acknowledgment of the holiness of a servant of God.

15. Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That is a prophet, or as one of the prophets.

The judgment of the world is very uncertain in all things, but extremely blind in those which relate to God. There are no conjectures so extravagant but men will have recourse to them rather than believe the word of God: so corrupt is the heart of man; so true is it that blindness is the just punishment of incredulity. These Jews, in their several judgments, afford us a lively representation of those pretended masters of reason, who affect always singularity in their opinions, and who believe every thing except truth.

16. But when Herod heard *thereof*, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.

God exercises his justice upon the sinner even by his sin itself. He needs only deliver him up to his conscience to be avenged of his iniquity. See here the repentance of a reprobate, who is not ashamed to confess his crime, and yet is ashamed to do penance for it! If the bare thought of John's resurrection gives Herod so much trouble, how will it be when all the elect, restored to life, shall rise up in judgment against their persecutors, and demand vengeance on them!

17. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her.

Unchastity is unjust and cruel. A man sacrifices every thing to an infamous creature when he has once made her his idol. God commonly punishes one enormous sin by another more enormous. There is no more dreadful punishment of public lewdness than for a man to be abandoned to wickedness, to persecute God's ministers, and to murder a saint.

18. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.

The world will always charge it as a crime on righteous persons and zealous preachers, for them to rebuke sinners, and to speak the truth without regard to any man. It is a

very grievous misfortune which attends the great, to be accustomed to be never contradicted in the least things; they will not be so afterward in their most unjust passions. This is the fruit either of a bad education, or of a prostituted flattery. These persons are resolved to be praised, and when they have no virtues which can be commended, it seems their very vices become the subject of commendation on pain of death.

19. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not.

An adulteress cannot suffer any obstacles to her passion. When sin is once conceived in the heart, the person sooner or later finds an opportunity to finish and complete it. The difficulty of satisfying a violent passion does only inflame and stir it up the more.

20. For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

The sin of the flesh stifles the best thoughts, and all the good desires which the word of God has produced. The world is full of persons who take a pride in esteeming virtue, and in paying a particular respect to good men, so long as they give them no disturbance in their passions. But these become odious to the world as soon as ever they contradict its corrupt inclinations. A man is always ready to hate those whom he honours only out of policy or through a self-interested hypocrisy, and because he is afraid of their censure and reproofs.

21. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief *estates* of Galilee;

A crime is more than half committed when it is once resolved on; a convenient day cannot be long wanting to passion so violent and vigilant as revenge animated by an infamous love. The feasts of the world are days very convenient for sin, as the feasts of the church are for piety. It is a great misfortune to be engaged to be at the former; a great imprudence not to provide against the infectious air which is

there breathed; a great piece of unfaithfulness not to excuse ourselves from going when we can; and a very great folly to appear there without any manner of obligation.

22. And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give *it* thee. 23. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give *it* thee, unto the half of my kingdom.

Fatal alliance this between good cheer and lascivious objects! it is the source of the greatest evils. How is it possible for a person to go innocent out of those assemblies for diversion, from whence God's presence is excluded as much as possible; where they do not speak of him but to dishonour him; where all the senses are besieged and intoxicated with pleasures; where reason, hurried away by passion, becomes incapable of informing and directing the will; where unbridled lust, without the least restraint, sees nothing but what excites it; and where modesty and reservedness become a crime!

24. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. 25. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.

Vanity, feasting, and lasciviousness, joined together, render a person capable of all sorts of crimes. How dangerous are dancing and balls, and how many tragical effects do they produce! They awaken the criminal passion of Herod, and deprive him of his liberty and reason; they renew in the heart of Herodias the spirit of revenge, hatred, and rage against John; they make her daughter lose all shame and modesty; they cause all three to join in the horrible and sacrilegious murder of one of the greatest of saints; and involve this whole court in the crimes of injustice, cruelty, revenge, an impious oath, impurity, and several others which accompany the sin of Herod.

26. And the king was exceeding sorry; *yet* for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. 27. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,

Observe here in Herod, hypocrisy, superstition, and too

great a regard to men. His sorrow is the sign of the remorse of his conscience; and his conscience is his accuser and a witness of his crime. It is a penal blindness, justly due to the abuse of light and instruction, for a man to make a scruple of not performing an unjust oath, and to make none of delivering up an innocent person and a saint to the request of a dancer—to the revenge of an incensed adulteress. An oath is criminal, and by consequence void, when it cannot be performed without sin and injustice. How dangerous is it to take but one step in the paths of sin, since it is so very difficult to go back and retreat from it!

28. And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel; and the damsel gave it to her mother.

See here the fruit of a bad education, a wicked daughter of a wicked mother: they are serviceable to one another in order only to sin and damnation. Revenge causes a person to take pleasure and delight in that which, if passion were absent, would raise the greatest horror. This is a dreadful example for this sex, which is naturally so soft, timorous, and bashful: a woman could not arrive at once at such an excess of fury as to prefer the present of a head swimming in blood before every other favour which she might have asked. A person, by the least acts of infidelity, may rise at last to the greatest crimes, and to such as are most contrary to natural inclination. One is capable of every wickedness, when one is capable of forgetting God.

29. And when his disciples heard *of it*, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.

Behold here how one of the best of men, the Bridegroom's friend, and a zealous preacher of the truth, passes the last days of his life in disgrace at court, dies under oppression, is meanly buried,—not one person daring to speak for him,—and is abandoned by all, except a few faithful friends, who carry him in silence from the obscurity of a prison to the darkness of a grave. But the time of the man of God will come, when the time of man is past, and that of God is come.

SECT. IV.—CHRIST'S RETIREMENT.—THE MIRACLE OF THE FIVE LOAVES.

30. And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.

How good is it for a minister to recollect himself near Jesus Christ after his labours! How sweet is that repose which he tastes at the feet of truth, after missions, pastoral visitations, and the fatigues of preaching! And how necessary is this repose, to keep him from being too much satisfied in himself and in his good success through a vain complacency, or from continuing, as it were, out of himself, by distraction of heart! To give account to Christ, is for a man to examine his heart and his own conduct in his presence. There are many who give this account to themselves, with respect to their actions and their faults; but few think of doing it, as the apostles here did, with respect likewise to the doctrine which they have taught, examining whether it be sound, founded on the word of God, and proper to lead souls to perfection and salvation.

31. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. 32. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.

The zeal of a bishop ought not to be harsh toward his fellow-workers; but he should take care of those who labour much in the church; he should be tender of their health, and procure them rest. He must neither tempt the weak by toils which are above their strength, nor urge the strong to exert their very utmost abilities; but he must consider their wants, and apply himself to the relief of them; and not give the devil an opportunity of tempting them, by tiring them with immoderate and continual labour, or by forgetting their necessities.

33. And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.

Happy those labourers in the church, the sweet savour of

whose life and conversation attracts people after Christ! The intermission of extraordinary labours is not only advantageous to the ministers themselves, but it serves likewise to awaken the zeal of the faithful, and to make them desire more ardently that which they no longer enjoy.

34. And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

We see abundance of priests, of doctors of the law, and Pharisees among the Jews, but not one pastor or shepherd. Jesus Christ alone is the good Shepherd, and they reject him. His charity is one of the marks or characters of his mission. He who feeds not his people with the word of God, as much as is necessary, is by no means a pastor. How many of Christ's sheep, both on this and on the other side of the seas, have no shepherds; while so many of the clergy either shamefully live in idleness, or unprofitably tire themselves in works of vanity! Lord, this flock and these sheep are thine: vouchsafe to send them pastors of thy own choosing, and according to thy own heart.

35. And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time *is* far passed: 36. Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.

The earth is a dark and desert place, where the soul can find no manner of sustenance but by Jesus Christ. Can it beg this of him too frequently? The charity of the apostles is provident indeed, but they know not as yet the extent of that of their Master. To whom should these people go, having found him who provides the food both of temporal and eternal life! He has bread to give them which they know not of.

37. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?

Charity cannot resolve to desert the miserable under the greatest seeming impossibilities. A man cannot peremptorily refuse an alms, unless he has given or forsaken all for Christ's sake. If there be any defect in the charity of the apostles,

it is their considering more their own poverty than the riches and power of their Master, and their not having recourse thereto. We ought to make use of our credit and interest in behalf of the poor, when we cannot relieve them ourselves.

38. He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. 39. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. 40. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.

The Christian feeds on five loaves: (1.) On Jesus Christ and his mysteries, in applying himself to them by faith. (2.) On his word, by hearing it. (3.) On his body, in [spiritually] receiving it. (4.) On his grace, by confiding in it. (5.) On his will and righteousness, in doing it. And that he may relish them the better, he makes use of the example of the humble and suffering life of Christ and of the saints.

41. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave *them* to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.

If Jesus Christ does not give his blessing, and cause men to make a holy use of this divine food, it will only do them harm. It is his appointment, that we should receive it by the ministry of ordinary pastors. It is to them that he has intrusted his loaves; it belongs to them to distribute them, as the trustees of his power and charity. He shows them in his own person, in what disposition they ought to be, in order to dispense his gifts with advantage; they must acknowledge that they come from heaven, and that nothing belongs to, or proceeds from themselves, but the imperfections which they mix with them; that it is the unction and benediction they have received from and by Jesus Christ which renders them beneficial; and that, being designed for their neighbour's edification, they are to be dispensed in such a manner as may be most profitable for him, and most according to his capacity.

42. And they did all eat, and were filled.

How few are there who sufficiently consider the infinite difference there is between eating, and being filled; and that more in relation to the food of the soul, than to that of the

body! Those eat without being filled who make a considerable progress in the knowledge of Christ, and little or none at all in his love; who read his word without profiting thereby; who partake frequently of his representative body, without partaking of his Spirit; and are very exact in outward performances, without any inward piety.

43. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. 44. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.

The treasures of the truths, word, sacraments, grace, and mysteries of Jesus Christ are inexhaustible. Here is a slight draught of what God requires of a pastor, and of what a true pastor expects from God. The word, truths, and sacraments which he dispenses after a holy manner, are very often more profitable to him than to those to whom he dispenses them. Wonderful is the usury in this dispensation; the less a man puts out of his own, the greater is his return; the less share he has in the principal, the higher his interest rises; and the more he seems to lose, the more he certainly gains.

SECT. V.—CHRIST PRAYS, WALKS ON THE SEA, AND CURES ALL THE SICK.

45. And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people. 46. And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.

Retirement and prayer always succeed the great and remarkable works of Christ: in this his ministers and members ought to imitate him. Retirement is so necessary to those who labour, that if they are not of themselves inclined thereto, they should be urged to enter into it, after the example of our Lord. It belongs to bishops to procure the conveniences proper for it, and to furnish the subordinate pastors and other labourers with the means thereof, to set them an example of it themselves, and to support, instruct, and encourage them therein.

47. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.

Christ enjoys perfect rest and felicity in the bosom of his

Father, while his church is in the midst of the sea of this life. Every one of us is no other than a little bark rowing against the wind, in a tempestuous sea, encompassed with the darkness of the night, and destitute of all help and succour. He who is not afraid in this condition, sees not the danger of it; whoever sees it, and does not pray, knows nothing of his own weakness.

48. And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

Every thing is contrary to salvation without Jesus Christ. He leaves us sometimes to ourselves, on purpose that we may know ourselves, and the need we have of him; but he never loses sight of us. This is an emblem of the church guided by its pastors. Did men but consider them as mariners, always tugging at the oar, always rowing against the wind, and always in danger, they would not envy their condition. Their comfort is, that Christ has his eye continually on the bark, that he sees their pains and difficulties, and will certainly come to their assistance. He frequently lets a great part of the night pass away, without succouring his church in a plain and sensible manner. This is to give us occasion to exercise our trust and confidence toward him, and to wait his proper time.

49. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: 50. For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

We sometimes take the inspirations of God for no other than illusions. His word and his light cause us to distinguish them. We have but little knowledge of his ways, and oftentimes that which he designs for our good terrifies us. There is sometimes a kind of mutiny in the ship of the church, and a great clamour is raised at the sight of certain truths, as if they were errors; and even those who sit at the helm are alarmed at a phantom which they fancy they see. But as soon as Christ speaks, and they are capable of hearing him, his truth manifestly appears, their apprehensions vanish, and all grows quiet.

51. And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.

Jesus Christ, who is present to the heart and to his whole church, makes the storms of temptation, persecution, and error to cease, whenever he pleases. How strange is the darkness of this present life! The presence, word, and miracles of Christ—every thing here disturbs the weak, every thing is to others a matter of scandal or offence. But wo be to him who gives any occasion thereof!

52. For they considered not *the miracle* of the loaves; for their heart was hardened.

How rarely do men preserve the remembrance of the favours and blessings they have received! If they did, it would give them trust and confidence when they have most occasion for them. We are amazed, and that with reason, to find that miracles so evident did not open the eyes and understanding of these poor disciples; but are not all our senses surrounded on every side with the wonderful works of God, and yet we scarce so much as take any notice of them? The miracle of the loaves is wrought every day. And we less admire in this the divine goodness and power, for no other reason, but only because these attributes are really more admirable herein, on the account of the regular, constant, and unchangeable order in which it is performed.

53. And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. 54. And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, 55. And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.

Men readily enough know and own Christ, when he bestows upon them temporal benefits; but they seldom call to mind the benefits which he has done to the inward man hidden in the heart. We must not think of enjoying Christ by ourselves, and receiving the whole advantage of his truth and gifts. We ought to invite others to partake of them, to diffuse the sweet odour of his name, and to assist the weak to the utmost of our power: this is one part of the duties of the members which belong to one and the same body, and the very spirit of the communion of saints.

56. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

Happy that sick person, who, following the example of these people, is never weary in seeking out the true Physician, by a faith and confidence accompanied with good works! Let us learn to profit by the presence of Christ, who comes to us so many different ways. To assist the sick, to give or to procure them remedies, is a work of charity very acceptable to Christ; but how much more so is it to be instrumental in restoring to them the health of the soul! God affixes his assistances and graces to whatever he pleases, to the hem or border of Christ's garment.

CHAPTER VII.

SECT. I.—UNWASHEN HANDS.—HUMAN TRADITIONS.

1. Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. 2. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen hands, they found fault.

They know God but little who imagine that he has any regard to external cleanness. The neglect of some certain degree of neatness, when it proceeds from the spirit of repentance and a contempt of one's self, may honour God as much as the affectation of neatness dishonours him, if it proceed from self-love, and a desire of pleasing men.

3. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.

Blind wretches, to value themselves upon a superstitious practice, and to think it meritorious! False traditions, which are founded only on popular errors, are sometimes religiously observed, while those which are holy and sacred are neglected.

4. And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as* the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables.

It is the heart which a man must wash; it is the inward

part which he must examine, when he has been busied about worldly affairs, and which he must cleanse in the presence of God from the filth which it may have thereby contracted. External performances are more apt to puff up than to sanctify, when not animated by the Spirit of God. To such as place their whole religion in them, they generally become an occasion of condemning and calumniating the most virtuous persons.

5. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?

One of the greatest marks of the corruption of the heart is, for a man to place the main of religion in outward performances, while, at the same time, he violates charity, which is the whole law of God. It shows great ignorance in the way of salvation, to disturb the church with unprofitable questions or trifles, as if the essentials of the gospel were in dispute, and, in the mean time, to neglect the commandments of God. The things from which, before our meals, we ought to wash and cleanse, not our hands, but our hearts, are the forgetfulness of God's benefits who feeds us, that greediness and haste with which we commonly sit down at table, the suggestions to intemperance and sensuality, and the neglect of offering to God this action, and beseeching him to sanctify it by his Holy Spirit.

6. He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. 7. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

Sacrifices, fasts, mortifications, and alms are good in themselves, but when the heart is not with God, they are only a body without a soul. Some human usages are no better than a vain worship, and an honour which God accepts not; and that not only such of them as are directly opposite to his commandments, but those also which amuse, divert, and hinder the creature from paying to the Creator the necessary duties of religion. Let my heart draw near thee, O my God, by the imitation of thy goodness, since this is the honour which thou dost require!

8. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

It is a strange instance of corruption, to set the traditions and ordinances of men in the place of the commandment of God. Self-love is infinitely pleased with this change, and with bestowing on pots and cups that care and application which is due to ourselves. Nothing is troublesome to us, provided we be not obliged to change our hearts. If we do not literally imitate these Jews, let us take heed that we do not something equivalent.

9. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

Self-love inclines us to adore our own inventions, even to the prejudice of God's commandments. The openly wicked do not perhaps contribute so much to the weakening the truth of the divine law by their vicious lives, as those who make profession of loving it do by their explications and relaxations, which are contrary to the Spirit of God. The former are discredited by their very lives, and make no impression upon any but such as are like themselves; whereas the latter gain credit by their profession, and are heard with confidence by good men.

10. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:

It is a very great proof of the corruption of nature, that it was necessary to make a law concerning a duty which one cannot neglect without being unnatural. Next to God, our parents are the first persons whom he would have us honour, as being the most lively images of the First Person of the blessed Trinity, from whom all paternity in heaven and earth is derived, and the channels which convey to us the first gifts of God—being life, education, subsistence, etc.

11. But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is* Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free.*

It is no other than to insult the divine law, to make a jest of religion, and to trample charity under foot, for a man to dogmatize against the first by inhuman and unnatural maxims,

to cover himself with the second as a cloak for this avarice, and to seem to value himself upon the third at the same time he is destroying it. In vain do men endeavour to colour over their impiety with the finest pretences imaginable: God sees it, God judges it, and will one day lay it open before the eyes of the whole world.

2. And ye suffer him no more to do aught for his father or his mother; 13. Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

The honour due to fathers and mothers, both by divine and natural law, consists not in bare words, but in assistance, spiritual and temporal, in respect, obedience, and obliging carriage, in bearing with the defects either of temper or of age, and of helping and supporting them im sickness, poverty, and troubles, without growing peevish, ashamed, or tired; and all this, neither through hypocrisy, interest, or human regards, but from a sense of duty, out of gratitude, piety, love, and religion, and to honour our heavenly Father in his image. To take away from parents what is due to them, in order to give it to the church, is sacrilege rather than sacrifice. God will not accept that from the hand of the priest which he expects to receive from us by the hands of our parents.

SECT. II.—IT IS THE HEART WHICH DEFILES A MAN.

14. ¶ And when he had called all the people *unto him*, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one *of you*, and understand: 15. There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.

This is a rule concerning Christian liberty of great use, but understood and followed by very few. It ought not to serve as a vail to cover intemperance, disobedience, or want of charity in the use of meats; but as a direction in order to our living like true servants and children of God, by the spirit of faith and charity, by the mortification of the heart and its passions, by inward and spiritual purity, by adoration in spirit and truth, by the spirit of the gospel, which makes

Christians—not by the spirit of the law, which makes only carnal Jews.

16. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

This rule must needs be of very great importance to Christians. For our great Master, (1.) Calls all the people unto him on purpose to tell them only this, (ver. 14.) (2.) He requires of them a particular attention. (3.) He requires it of every one without exception. (4.) He exhorts them to endeavour thoroughly to understand it. And, (5.) He here lets them know, that in order to do it they have need of a singular grace, and a particular gift of understanding. It was for want of understanding this rule, that the Jews still remained Jews, adhering to a mere external way of worship. It is for the very same reason, that abundance of Christians, even at this day, serve God like Jews, and not like Christians.

17. And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. 18. And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, *it* cannot defile him; 19. Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?

Let us fear that more, which, arising from ourselves, is lodged in our hearts, than that which enters from without into our bodies. How could the Jews possibly know of what remedy and what physician they stood in need, since they did not well know either the disease of man, or the source and cause of it, which is sin and the corruption of the heart? The Jew, full of the ceremonial and figurative law, is mindful only of the external impurities which it points out, and of the remedies it prescribes, and by his superstitious exactness increases the number of them: the Christian, enlightened by faith, applies himself to discover and know his own heart, his diseases, and his only physician, Jesus Christ.

20. And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

How much ought we to distrust our own heart, since that which it produces of itself is nothing but falsehood and sin! Whatever love of truth and righteousness it has, must proceed

from some other source. Lord, it is thou who art this source, without which nothing in me is pure and innocent. Pour forth on my heart thy celestial water, wash away its impurities, moisten its dryness, heal its wounds, soften its hardness, warm its coldness, bring it again into thy ways, and vouchsafe to guide it therein!

21. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22. Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23. All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

The heart of man is by the grace of Christ a source of all good; and of all evil by its own wickedness. Sin is always committed in the heart before it appears outwardly. There is no sin without the love of ourselves; as there is no good work without the love of God. It is through thy grace, O my God, that so corrupt a soil as that of my will does not produce all these accursed fruits. It is through thy mercy, that whatever of them it does produce is plucked up and forgotten before thee.

SECT. III.—THE WOMAN OF CANAAN.

24. ¶ And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into a house, and would have no man know *it:* but he could not be hid.

God resists the humble person as well as the proud: the former, by making him manifest when he hides himself; the latter, by humbling him when he exalts himself. An evangelical labourer ought of himself to be disposed to live private and concealed, but without any prejudice to what he owes his neighbour. Happy is that person who is made manifest, not because he will not, but because he cannot be hid!

25. For a *certain* woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: 26. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.

Every sin is an unclean spirit which possesses the sinner. It is at the feet of Jesus that he must seek a remedy for it. Would to God the sinner had the same zeal and earnestness

in regard to his soul which this woman has for her daughter's deliverance, her fidelity in not letting slip the opportunity which God presents, and that humility which causes her to fall at the feet of the sovereign Physician! Few mothers resemble this. The generality, instead of shutting the heart of their daughters against the evil spirit of vanity, of impurity, and of the love of the world, or of endeavouring to cast him out thence, rather set it open to him a thousand different ways.

27. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* unto the dogs.

Jesus Christ, faithful to the Jews notwithstanding their ingratitude, notwithstanding all the evil effects of it which he foresaw, by his own example forbids us to return unfaithfulness for unfaithfulness, or evil for evil. Let parents learn from him, not to do any injustice to their children out of revenge or hatred; to give those the preference to whom it is due, and not to favour the rest with a larger share than the law allows. God tries those on whom he intends to bestow great favours. A seeming rigour frequently prepares the way for extraordinary blessings.

28. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.

Faith and humility are very ingenious and eloquent before God. This woman gives us an idea of a true penitent, who is willing to be treated with a holy severity, to be humbled even for the faults committed in his repentance, to judge himself unworthy of the Lord's table; so far is he from being impatient at being kept back from it, is satisfied with the crumbs, and endeavours in some measure to deserve the bread of his soul by exercises of humility, by the love of God's word, and by prayer. When God undertakes to humble the sinner, he has no other part to choose but to submit to his conduct, and to put himself into a condition of attracting his compassion.

29. And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. 30. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.

Of how great importance is it to improve all the opportunities which God vouchsafes us for the exercise of any virtue;

salvation sometimes depending upon one single opportunity! To neglect this and let it slip, is to hazard all. The devil is not able to resist humility; even God himself does not. Here is a great miracle granted to one word of faith, but of a faith which is itself a gift of God. His goodness is so great, that his gifts become our merits. How great comfort is it to a Christian mother, when God is pleased at last to grant to her prayers the salvation of a daughter possessed with the spirit of the world! But how few are there who beg this blessing!

SECT. IV.—THE DEAF AND DUMB PERSON HEALED.

31. ¶ And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.

Charity has its rules and measures in the distribution of spiritual good things, as well as in that of temporal. We do not see upon what account Christ leaves one country to pass into another; the reasons hereof are hidden in the secret designs of God. One advantage which Christ draws from it is, to show us that he is absolute master of his own gifts, and that he owes us nothing; to keep men under the apprehension of losing him, and to induce them to profit by his word and benefits while they enjoy him.

32. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.

Human nature was incapable of hearing the doctrine of salvation, and of acknowledging its own misery, when the Son of God came to seek it; and every sinner left to himself has this double inability in some degree. A man is deaf and dumb, when he refuses to hear the truth, to be attentive to it, and to obey it. Deplorable deafness this, which is voluntary, and of which a man is unwilling to be cured! for as soon as ever he is willing, and humbly begs a remedy, he is no longer either deaf or dumb.

33. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;

How great is the mercy shown toward a sinner, when God chooses him out of a multitude of others, on purpose to give

him faith, and the grace to confess his name! Nothing but the merits, word, and grace of Him who is both God and man, can open our heart to the truth, can infuse into it the love and relish thereof, and inspire it with courage to confess it. Every thing is efficacious in Jesus Christ, every thing is full of virtue, because every thing in him is united to the word and to the eternal wisdom.

34. And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. 35. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.

It is by prayer, and the secret sighs of the heart, that Christ applies his merits. If the conversion of a sinner cost Jesus Christ so many desires, prayers, and sighs, is it not reasonable that it should likewise cost the sinner himself some? Is it not necessary that his servants, called and separated to this work, should be men of desires, prayers, and sighs? That which Christ does here, is the pattern which a minister of the church ought to follow, who, in the exercise of his ministry, in performing the ceremonies of the sacraments, and in pronouncing the words and prayers over sinners, in the name and by the authority of the church and of Christ himself, ought to lift up his heart toward heaven, to groan and sigh in behalf of those under his hand, and to expect every thing from him who is the sovereign Master of all hearts. O Jesus! pronounce over mine, over the hearts of sinners, and of all those who ought to hear thee and to speak in thy stead, these words, "Be opened," and thou shalt be immediately obeyed.

36. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published *it;*

A benefit becomes so much the more worthy to be published, by how much the more he who does it endeavours to conceal it. The humility of the benefactor, and the gratitude of the receiver, may very well oppose each other without any prejudice to the peace of their hearts. Though Christ be not here obeyed, yet his prohibition is not altogether fruitless, since it affords an instruction for his ministers, and a pattern for all his members.

37. And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

It is proper only to Christ to make man capable of hearing the voice of his God, and of praising his majesty. He did nothing but what was useful and beneficial to men, because it was for their sakes that he was made man. That which we owe to the actions of Christ is not only to admire what is great and illustrious in them, but likewise to consider the tendency and design of them. It is a very great commendation of a minister, to say that he does all things well; that is, with gravity, modesty, and external decency, and with application, piety, and internal religion. This is the way to make even the deaf to hear the truth, and to draw from sinners an acknowledgment and confession of their miseries.

CHAPTER VIII.

SECT. I.—THE MIRACLE OF THE SEVEN LOAVES.

1. In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and saith unto them,

Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, seems desirous to take advice of his disciples, that he may set an example to the chief pastors of the church. He permitted this want, and chose this opportunity to feed this people, on purpose to teach the poor to have recourse to him as their refuge in their necessities, and to put the rich in mind that it is he who keeps them from falling into poverty, and who gives them all their wealth and riches.

2. I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat:

Jesus Christ has had his elect before the law, under the law, and from the time of his incarnation; which three periods are represented by these three days; and in all these seasons they have been, and shall be, with him by means of faith, hope, and charity. Alas! how much did those who lived before the incarnation long after Jesus Christ, the bread of

heaven, who freely gives himself to us, and is become our daily bread! The Jews having nothing but types and shadows, and carnal sacrifices, incapable of nourishing the soul, had, properly speaking, nothing to eat; in like manner the Gentiles, who had nothing but what was capable of giving them death. All thanks be rendered to thee, O holy and adorable Victim, true bread of souls, for having had compassion on thy people, and having given them thyself for their food and nourishment!

3. And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.

Faith grows weak, hope faint, and charity cold, during the pilgrimage of this life, especially in those who have been a long time at a distance from God, unless he vouchsafe to give them new strength. They come from far who come from the region of sin, which is so remote from God. Jesus Christ himself is the living bread, which is the happiness and joy of angels in the heavenly country, and the strength and remedy of men in their way thither. Christ does not feed those who come from far, till he has nourished them a great while with his word, tried their fidelity and perseverance, and fully known their want and their hunger. Thus great sinners are to be treated, before they are fed with the eucharist.

4. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these *men* with bread here in the wilderness?

Nothing here below is capable of supporting, healing, and satisfying the heart of man. The Holy Ghost supports it by his strength, Christ heals it by his grace, and God will satisfy it with his glory. Can we fear wanting any thing when we have Jesus Christ with us, when we have him for our pastor? Yes, Lord, thou art our pastor, and nothing will ever be wanting to those who trust in thee, and are within thy fold, which is the church.

5. And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.

These seven loaves are emblems of the seven habitual gifts of the Holy Ghost, of which our blessed Saviour makes use to weaken in us the contrary habits, and to strengthen us against

concupiscence. O Holy Spirit, who did rest on Jesus Christ in order to fill his members through him, be thou our wisdom to raise us to the knowledge of the mysteries of religion, our understanding to comprehend the truths of salvation and our duties, our counsel in all our doubts, our strength in all our weakness, our knowledge in whatever belongs to our vocation, our piety in all our actions, and our filial and religious fear in all the temptations of this life!

6. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before *them;* and they did set *them* before the people.

The Word took these seven gifts in his incarnation, inspired them into the apostles by sending the Holy Ghost, and by their ministry has shed them abroad in the hearts of all the faithful by the means of the word and sacraments. Without a new gift, without the benediction of his actual grace, which is obtained by prayer, we can make but an ill use of these habitual gifts.

7. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before *them.*

The bountiful hand of Christ's love never blesses and multiplies, but only in order to distribute; whereas the niggardly hand of secular love gathers and heaps together with no other intent but to hoard. We do not find that Jesus Christ ever gave a blessing to great riches, but only to some few things necessary to life: which was to show us that it is through his invisible blessing that the poor, who are religious, always find wherewith to subsist, and are more contented in their poverty than the rich in their abundance.

8. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left seven baskets. 9. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

The gifts of God fill the heart without being wasted or diminished, and multiply in all the faithful. It is Christ who blesses our food, and renders it sufficient for us, when by prayer we in his name and Spirit bless our provisions before we eat. In doing this let us always have before our eyes this blessing of Christ, and beseech him that his invisible hand

may bless us as well as his gifts, and cause us to use them after a Christian manner. Bless us, Lord, and these thy gifts, etc.

SECT. II.—A SIGN REFUSED.—THE APOSTLES REPROVED FOR THEIR WANT OF UNDERSTANDING.

10 ¶ And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. 11. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.

Nothing is sufficient to make him see who is wilfully blind. None but Pharisees seek Jesus Christ to dispute with him. He would have men seek him as disciples and scholars, not as wranglers and cavillers. Many, even at this day, converse with him and study his truths in the Scriptures, only out of a spirit of disputation and contest, never satisfied with that which satisfies all others. New miracles are wanting for some sort of persons, and yet they would not fail to take occasion even from them to raise new disputes.

12. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.

The voluntary blindness of the great pretenders to learning and strong reasoning, is the most deplorable condition imaginable, and that out of which they seldom recover. There is nothing to be done for these persons, but only to groan and sigh deeply for them from the bottom of the heart. Miracles are of no manner of use to those who are resolved not to believe. For what reason do these Pharisees, and others like them, seek after signs and miracles, but only that they may have the pleasure to contest the truth of them, to nonplus religion if possible, and reduce it to want of proof? Let us adore the conduct of Jesus Christ, and imitate his wisdom.

13. And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.

God generally abandons these disputers to the vanity of their own mind. It is a dreadful judgment when truth withdraws itself entirely from a person, and leaves, as it were, a chaos or deep sea between itself and a mind puffed up with

pride. Every one has his share of this spirit, few are sensible of it, and all ought to fear lest it remove Christ at a distance from them.

14. ¶ Now *the disciples* had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf.

How happy is he whom the relish of Christ's word causes to forget the necessities of life. This forgetfulness will be the occasion of new instructions; for Christ makes every thing contribute to the salvation of his elect.

15. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and *of* the leaven of Herod.

Every state has its leaven, as it has its grace. The leaven of the pretenders to devotion is hypocrisy and envy; that of courtiers and great persons is ambition and crafty policy. These are two sorts of enemies which truth and its disciples have most reason to fear. Every one ought to take heed, and to secure himself from them, not by artifice or violence, but by arming himself with patience and trust in God, by adhering steadfastly to the truth, and by continually watching over himself, that he may not be drawn away either by authority or deceit.

16. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is* because we have no bread.

The perfect Christian still raises his mind from sensible things to spiritual; the imperfect lets his sink insensibly from spiritual to sensible and carnal things. The more faith decreases, the more a man concerns himself about the wants of the body, and the more his sight of spiritual things decays. It is very useful and important for a man to say frequently to himself, Eternity is that about which I ought to be chiefly employed.

17. And when Jesus knew *it*, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?* [* *Fr.* Have ye yet neither sense nor understanding, and is your heart continually in blindness?]

How justly is this reproof due to those Christians who are altogether taken up with the cares of this present life? If this anxious solicitude is blamable even in the poor; how

much more is it so in those who have necessaries in abundance? To distrust God, after all which he has done to make known his providence over mankind, and his fatherly care toward his children, is to want not only faith, but even sense and understanding. Illuminate us, O Lord, anew with thy light, and suffer not our hearts to fall into this blindness!

18. Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?

One may well apply this with more apparent truth to those children of the earth who mind nothing but earth, and heaping up of riches. They have no eyes to see the vanity and frailty of these things, no ears to hear what faith declares to them concerning them, and no memory to remember how God overturns at his pleasure the greatest fortunes, and scatters abroad that wealth wherein they put their whole trust and confidence.

19. When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. 20. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. 21. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?

The little use we make of God's gifts, our forgetfulness of his particular benefits, and our not taking sufficient notice of the visible wonders which he works every day for us in the world, make it evident that sin has spread its darkness over the understanding of man, as well as over his heart. There is need of somewhat more than miracles to establish faith and Christian confidence. Without thy grace, O Jesus! man still remains what he is of himself, even in the midst of the most surprising prodigies. It is not to insult thy disciples that thou speakest so harshly to them in appearance, but to make them sensible of their condition and their wants, and to oblige them to put their whole confidence in thee.

SECT. III.—THE BLIND MAN CURED.

22. ¶ And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.

Jesus employs all means to make us apprehend this truth, That all human nature is, through sin, become blind as to the

things of God. It was in order to cure it that he united himself thereto by his incarnation, and that he has, as it were, touched it with his person and divine substance so closely as to make with it but one and the same person. This cure advances in proportion as Christ unites himself to any particular soul by faith and charity. Our heart is like a blind person, which we must frequently present to Christ, that he may touch it with his invisible hand. Charity ought to imitate him in applying itself to enlighten those who are ignorant of their own blindness, and do not desire to be cured of it.

23. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught.

The humility, wisdom, and power of the word incarnate, concur to the curing of our blindness. Ignorance of the truth, or spiritual blindness, is generally both the daughter and mother of pride. A man must manage those prudently whom he designs to cure of this blindness, taking them aside in private in order to make them sensible thereof, how public soever it may be. The hand of our blessed Saviour is an emblem of his healing grace, and of the conduct of his ministers. He here uses it to three purposes: (1.) That he may be a guide to this blind man while he continues blind. (2.) That he may apply the remedy to him. (3.) That he may give him imposition of hands. A man may imitate Christ herein, (1.) By treating the person spiritually blind with a charitable mildness before his cure. (2.) By applying to him the remedy of evangelical truths with a great deal of discretion. (3.) By praying, and doing good offices for him.

24. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. 25. After that he put *his* hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.

The cure of our blindness is only begun here on earth; for our understanding has some degrees of darkness which will not be dispersed until we come to heaven. This cure requires abundance of patience; because the light of truth does not often enter all at once into the soul. God would have men learn the greatness of the evil, the necessity of his grace, and

the difficulty of the cure, from the delay of his light, and the several degrees thereof through which they must pass. It is one of the duties of a pastor and spiritual director, to study this gradual progression, and not to leave the patient until he is perfectly cured.

26. And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell *it* to any in the town.

When man shall be perfectly cured of his blindness, he will praise God in the eternal silence of his house. Let us begin the sacrifice of thanksgiving here below. Retirement of one sort or another is, as it were, necessary after conversion. When a man has once received the knowledge of the truth, he must long meditate upon it in private, feed on it in silence, and let it take deep root in his heart before he speaks of it. There is an eagerness to impart it to others which does not proceed from God, and may be prejudicial to beginners.

SECT. IV.—THE PASSION FORETOLD.—PETER REBUKED.

27. ¶ And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Cesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?

None but Jesus can speak of himself without danger. It is very advantageous to discourse of his mysteries in journies and in common conversations. It is neither out of ignorance, nor curiosity, nor want of other discourse, that Christ speaks on this subject; but, on the contrary, from a knowledge of the different opinions men had concerning him, and from a desire to satisfy their curiosity by the truth, and to avoid by means of holy instructions the loss of time which usually attends travelling.

28. And they answered, John the Baptist: but some *say*, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

The world is blind as to every thing which relates to Christ. It is not by leaving our understanding to its own conjectures that we discover Christ and his truths, but by consulting the Scriptures. Extreme blindness this, that men should be willing to trust to themselves in this matter without the least proof or evidence, rather than depend on Christ, who declares

it himself, proves it by miracles, and confirms it by prophecies.

29. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

The true knowledge of the mysteries of Christ is not to be found, but only among the disciples of the truth and the light. Out of this school, there is nothing but uncertainty or falsehood. O Jesus! thou art the Christ, that is, the Anointed of the Lord, sent to save the world; anointed with the Divinity itself, that thou mayest communicate part of thy unction to thy members. Render me faithful to this grace in always following the Spirit of the divine adoption.

30. And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.

Pride gives men the curiosity to know what the world says of them; Christ plainly shows that he is very far from it, since he will not as yet be known. Truths have their proper time of discovery; let us not anticipate it. It was necessary that Jesus Christ should himself bear witness to his divinity before Pilate, and be the first martyr thereof, to merit for his disciples the grace to follow his example, and to bear the same witness by their martyrdom. Until then, it was their part to be silent.

31. And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and *of* the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Christ here gives an abridgment of the mysteries of his death and resurrection. It was necessary to establish the belief of his divinity before he proposed that of the mystery of the cross. To human understanding, these seem to contradict one another; but it is on this very account that his sufferings are more amiable to us, and that this mystery is more a mystery of faith. Let us be heartily willing to suffer, to be rejected of the world, and to be crucified with Christ, if we desire to rise with him.

32. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

Corrupt reason often finds somewhat amiss in the divine

conduct. It is always deceived, when it will needs concern itself to judge thereof and to rectify it. A pardonable error this in Peter, who had not yet seen the world subjected to God by the cross of Christ, but intolerable in those who fully know the wonders and power of it. Let my reason, O my God, with an entire submission, continually adore the infinitely wise contrivances of thy sovereign reason!

33. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

Human sentiments are always opposite to the ways of God. Whoever opposes the love of the cross is a Satan. Reason, left to itself, is incapable of receiving the mysteries of faith. Christ looks on his disciples while he speaks to Peter, to let them know that this lesson concerns them all, and us as well as them. How dangerous a counsellor is natural tenderness in the affairs of salvation! Men think to preserve nature, to please a friend, and to use a penitent gently, by sparing them in what is troublesome and grievous; and so they ruin them by a fatal kindness.

34. ¶ And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Self-denial is the abridgment of the morality of the gospel, which concerns everybody, and consists in renouncing not only some external things, but the old man entirely; namely, whatever is irregular and corrupt in the understanding, judgment, memory, will, and affections, and whatever is therein opposite to Jesus Christ, his cross, and his gospel. There is no manner of privilege, no difference in the least, between the pastors and the flock, in relation to the cross and evangelical self-denial. It is for this very reason that Christ joins the people with his disciples, and, as it were, to justify his conduct toward Peter by the most fundamental part of the gospel.

35. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

The love of this present life is contrary to salvation; a man must lose his life for the sake of Christ in order to find

it again in him. The whole tenor of the gospel teaches us, that the contempt of this mortal life is a necessary means to obtain that which is immortal; but how few are convinced by it! It is not only before tyrants that we ought to wean ourselves from the love of life; but much more, while we are in the midst of the conveniences and satisfactions of it. The martyrs had only a few days or hours to fight against it, in the sight of torments and death; but Christians, during their whole life, are to maintain their ground against the allurements of pleasure.

36. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

All gain is loss when a man does not save his soul. He who possesses all things without God, has nothing. No man is so foolish as to be willing to purchase an empire at the price of his life; and yet the world is full of those pretenders to wisdom, who give up their salvation and an immortal life for a vain pleasure, a handful of money, or an inch of land. How much are the greatest conquerers to be pitied, if, while intoxicated with their victories and conquests, they ravage and lay waste the earth, their own souls are laid waste by sin and passion, and destroyed to all eternity.

37. Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

A man has but one soul; and when that is once damned, there is no recovery. Fatal and dreadful experience this, when, after having enjoyed pleasures, riches, and empires a few years, men find, by losing all in a moment, that all is nothing, and that whatever they possessed here is altogether unprofitable for the other life!

38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Men are often too forward rather than otherwise, highly to commend truth among those who love and honour it: but to bear witness to it before those who do not favour it at all, is a thing more rare than can be imagined. We do not sufficiently dread this terrible threatening. We may flatter our-

selves if we please, here below, and by trivial reasons excuse ourselves from giving testimony to the word of Christ, and to himself in his servants; the day of the Lord will disperse all those clouds with which we cover ourselves, and expose to open view the base interests which we shall have preferred to those of God and of his church.

CHAPTER IX.

SECT. I.—THE TRANSFIGURATION.—THE COMING OF ELIAS.

1. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

God never promises any thing but he gives an earnest of it, even in this life. Christ, by a foretaste of his glory, confirms the belief of his incarnation, strengthens the hope of the resurrection and eternal life, awakens the love of truth, takes off the scandal of the cross, and encourages to the practice of self-denial, and all Christian perfection, wherein he had just now instructed his disciples.

2. ¶ And after six days Jesus taketh *with him* Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.

After the six days of this present life, the eternal Sabbath begins upon the holy mountain of heaven; where Christ entire, consisting of the Head and all the members, of Jesus and the church, shall be perfectly transfigured in glory. O mountain of Sion, city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, church of the first-born who are written in heaven, when will it be that we shall approach thee? When will that glorious transfiguration be accomplished which shall change this mortal body, and fashion it like unto the glorious body of our blessed Saviour?

3. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.

The saints in the state of eternity shall become all shining;

they shall be nothing but light and brightness there, both in body and soul, and that without changing their nature. In order to our bearing in our body one day the image of Christ, as the heavenly and spiritual man, we must now bear in it the image of him as the man of mortification and repentance. A true Christian, a true penitent, is, as it were, the fuller of his own flesh, which he takes the greatest pains to cleanse and whiten by mortification and works of repentance. But what is this purity which grace works in our bodies here on earth, in comparison of that which glory shall work in them in heaven?

4. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.

The truth which the prophets attested, published, and honoured with their blood, shall in heaven be in its full light and triumph. Charity, which the law pointed at, longed for, and regulated, shall be there in its fulness and kingdom. There is a perfect agreement between the law and the prophets, between the gospel and the apostles. Every thing in them all tends to make Jesus Christ known, and God in and by Jesus Christ, to form by faith and charity his mystical body on earth, and to conduct it up into the eternal mountain to be glorified there.

5. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

The church shall there enjoy the fruit of all its conflicts, a repose which shall never end, and a joy which cannot be expressed. All the saints, under their adorable Head, shall be there placed in their proper rank and order, which will make one of the chief beauties of God's house. Happy those who dwell in thy house, O my God! they will forever praise thee, and say, "It is good for us to be here." How good, how delectable is it to the brethren of thy Son, to see themselves all reunited with him in unity itself!

6. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.

The blessed will be there, as it were, intoxicated with the abundance of heavenly delights. How will this change agreeably surprise the children of God, to see themselves on a

sudden become, not only like to angels, but even like the Son of God himself! They, as well as the celestial powers, cannot but be filled with a holy dread and amazement at the sight of the divine Majesty.

7. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

They shall be hid in the secret place of God's presence, overshadowed with that cloud of light wherein God dwells, and shall enter into his bosom, where they shall forever hear these words, "This is my beloved Son." This is the eternal, essential, and unchangeable truth which thou hast desired, which thou hast diligently sought, and which thou hast at last found. Hear it, not with the ears of thy body, but with thy whole soul; which shall be fed, satisfied, and rendered happy thereby to all eternity.

8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

Then shall the law, prophecies, knowledge, tongues, ministries, Scriptures, vanish away; and the church shall see nothing any more, save Jesus Christ only in God, and God in him. The sight of the truth is seldom pure in this life. We seldom behold, seek, or love it, unveiled and alone. How many different views, searches, and desires, which are displeasing to it, are generally mixed with it! It is only upon the mountain of the heavenly Sion that Jesus Christ and truth are seen alone, and loved solely for their own sakes.

9. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.

Till the resurrection of Christ, no eye had seen, no ear had heard, and no understanding had been able to conceive, the things which God prepares for those who love him. Christ teaches us not to speak some certain truths at all times, nor to all sorts of persons; but to proportion our confidence according to them. Of the twelve apostles, there are but three to whom our blessed Lord manifests his glory before his death, that they may learn from him a holy discretion.

10. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.

The resurrection is a mystery which is incredible to human understanding, even to those who have been a long time in the school of the Son of God, who have received his instructions, and who have seen his miracles and glory. It is absolutely necessary that the Holy Ghost himself should teach a preacher, by the study of the Scriptures and by prayer, before he can be fit to teach others.

11. ¶ And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?

Jesus Christ had his Elias, who proclaimed him to the world; he will still have some of the same character throughout all ages, and before his last coming. It is the office of all preachers, pastors, and bishops, incessantly to admonish the faithful that the day is approaching, that Christ is at the door, and that he will come at an hour when we think not. Grant, O my God, that these Eliases may want neither zeal nor boldness of speech to awaken sinners, nor grace and unction sufficient to convert them!

12. And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought.

They who labour in the work of God, and endeavour to re-establish Christian morals in the church, must expect to be treated as Elias, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ himself were. A preacher who is not disposed to suffer and to be despised, is so far from restoring all things, that he is in danger of losing himself. He who foretold that Christ was to suffer and to be rejected of the world, has also foretold the same of his ministers; and therefore, if the world spare them, it is perhaps because they spare the world.

13. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.

We ought not to be surprised at seeing the faithful ministers of Christ persecuted, since there is nothing more clearly foretold in the Scriptures. The world seems to do unto the Eliases, John Baptists, and their successors, whatsoever it

listeth; but in truth it does nothing more than that which God is pleased to permit. The wicked, in spite of themselves, accomplish his holy will by their own wickedness, procuring, by their persecutions, not only the happiness of the saints, but also their own misery. He who foresaw, and has foretold this, has thereby shown that he is absolute Lord in this respect.

SECT. II.—THE LUNATIC.—FAITH.—PRAYER AND FASTING.

14. ¶ And when he came to *his* disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. 15. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to *him* saluted him.

A man of God imprints a respect and veneration on the minds of people. Christ often suffers his disciples and ministers to be pressed hard in a dispute, on purpose that they may know the want they have of him, and may have recourse to prayer with the greater earnestness. He sometimes comes to their assistance in a very surprising manner, to the end that his own hand may evidently appear, and that they may not give that to man which is due only to God.

16. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? 17. And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; 18. And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him; and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.

When Jesus Christ absents himself from us, we are nothing. A minister must not expect to have always success in the conversion of sinners. Sometimes the greatest care, application, and talents signify nothing, because God designs to effect the thing by himself, and to make his ministers more fit for his work, by making them more humble. Children diseased and possessed, are an evident proof of original sin; because, under a just God, none are miserable unless they deserve it. Bodily possession is a consequence and emblem of that of the soul, and of the dominion which the devil exercises over the heart by means of the passions.

19. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long

shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.

Let us imitate, on occasion, the obedience and charity of Christ, which detained him in the world, though the incredulity and contradiction thereof were a continual trouble to him. How intolerable soever some ministers and pastors, by reason of their want of faith, and their other defects, may possibly be, yet Christ ceases not mildly to bear with them, to continue with them, according to his promise, to work by their ministry, and even to produce by them extraordinary effects. Whoever finds his endeavours ineffectual on souls enslaved to sin and the devil, ought to conduct them to Christ, by addressing himself to him in more fervent prayers, or by procuring them the assistance of some others of his servants.

20. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.

The devil redoubles his assaults when he sees that Christ is ready to wrest a soul out of his hands. A passionate and headstrong sinner, who hardens himself, and obstinately withstands the admonitions and endeavours of a charitable pastor, is much more to be deplored than this miserable wretch, who is but an emblem of the other. There are few passions but what are able to raise in the soul more violent agitations than those which in this possessed person give us so much horror.

21. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.

From the very moment that man begins to bear a body of sin, he begins to be subject to the tyranny of the devil. He gains his dominion either over the soul or the body, according as the will opens to him the gate of the heart, or as God gives him power over the body, sometimes to punish sinners, sometimes to exercise and sanctify the just.

22. And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us.

The mischief which the devil does not do, evidently shows that what he does is by the permission of a will superior to his. It is this will which we ought to fear, not the devil, who

is only the minister and instrument hereof. There is nothing which he would not employ to our destruction, if the creatures were entirely subject to his power. It is of great importance not to rely too much upon our not having any inclination to some particular sin, and being well disposed to the contrary virtue. The devil knows how to deceive us and change our minds, and to make us pass from fire to water, and from water to fire. It is upon the power, mercy, and grace of Christ that we must altogether depend.

23. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth.

Faith is a very great treasure, since nothing is refused to it; but it belongs only to Him who gives all the rest, to give us faith also. Yes, Lord, all things are possible to him, to whom thou renderest all things possible by working them in him. Faith, the use, the increase, and the reward of it,—all is a gift of thy pure bounty.

24. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

The humble man is himself distrustful of his faith, and prays without ceasing for an increase of it. It is often so weak, that it scarce deserves the name. Who among us has, after the example of this person, made use of prayers and tears to obtain it? An humble acknowledgment of the imperfection of our faith, and of our other defects, is capable of making up every thing which is wanting to us; or rather, nothing is wanting to him who has humility.

25. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, *Thou* dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.

Those who love not either to speak or to hear of God, are possessed with a dumb and deaf spirit, from which Christ alone can deliver them. Happy are they into whom he never enters any more! What would not God grant to a faith which is perfect, since even to an imperfect one he grants much more than it asks! Jesus Christ never speaks to the devil but with threats, as to a slave. There are no measures

to be kept, where there is no longer the least hope of reconciliation or charity.

26. And *the spirit* cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.

The sinner suffers strange convulsions, when he endeavours to forsake his inveterate habits; and especially a young man who has continued under them from his childhood. To speak to him concerning renouncing his passions, is almost the same thing as to deprive him of his life. A young person possessed by sin, is a very proper instrument of the devil for all manner of wickedness; and therefore he omits nothing in order to secure him to himself. Such a person is dead to the world, and the world to him, when once he is thoroughly delivered from this calamity.

27. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.

What a happiness is it, when, amid the pangs and struggles of conversion, a sinner meets with an enlightened guide, a charitable hand to lift him up in his dejection, to comfort him under his pains, and to lead him into the ways of God! But what docility, what respect, what gratitude, does not the invisible hand of Christ, which is concealed under this visible one, deserve? May I, O Lord, have neither motion nor action, but by the guidance of this adorable hand, which thou hast been pleased to extend even unto me!

28. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? 29. And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

Nothing is more prevalent against the devil than prayer and fasting. Priests must make use of them in converting sinners, if they desire to succeed therein. Those sinners whom God or the church delivers sometimes unto Satan, for the punishment of some very heinous sins, cannot be set at liberty but by abundance of groans and mortifications. He who, for his crimes, is once put into the hands of the executioner, has need of very powerful solicitations to obtain his pardon; and, with regard to God, such are only to be found in prayer and penitential exercises, (presented in the name

of Jesus Christ, and with an humble reliance upon his merits as the only ground of forgiveness.)

SECT. III.—THE PASSION FORETOLD.—THE FIRST THE SERVANT OF ALL.

30. ¶ And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee: and he would not that any man should know *it*. 31. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.

The charity of Jesus Christ toward his disciples induces him to comfort them with the hopes of his resurrection, and at the same time that he afflicts them with the prediction of his death. When we cannot avoid giving affliction to our neighbour, we ought to give him comfort by the hopes of future happiness. We must prepare him for a favourable reception of ungrateful and mortifying truths, by accompanying them with others more proper to raise and support the mind.

32. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.

The spirit cannot understand what the flesh is unwilling to suffer. This seed, which Christ seems unprofitably to cast into a barren soil, will bring forth fruit in due time. We must not give over instructing, how dull soever the understandings of men are as to heavenly truths; the Spirit of God can open them, as he opened those of the apostles. We ought to be ashamed of that unreasonable bashfulness which makes us choose rather to continue ignorant than to discover our ignorance. Nothing but humility can secure us from it.

33. ¶ And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? 34. But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who *should be* the greatest.

How subtle is the poison of ambition! how difficult is it for a man to preserve himself from it in this life! Humility is peaceable, and always ready to give place; pride is always disputing about preference. If we look narrowly into the world, we shall find that this is what most generally reigns in all states and conditions whatsoever. Few people are heartily willing to be below others; they find as much difficulty almost

to bear an equality; and much the greatest number think of nothing but gaining a superiority. Who would imagine that ambition could take hold of persons who had forsaken all, and that the apostolical college should not be exempt from it? In short, everybody is subject to it, and nobody is willing to own it.

35. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, *the same* shall be last of all, and servant of all.

True greatness consists in renouncing greatness itself. A man becomes a slave to it when once he desires it; he is above it whenever he despises it. The primacy or first place in humility is the only one to which we are permitted to aspire. To dispute with secular persons which should be the greatest, is a thing very opposite to an ecclesiastical spirit. The only thing of which a minister of Christ ought to be ambitious, is to be the last of all. Humility must not be an idle virtue, but a virtue useful to our neighbour. It places its chief joy not only in being below all, but even in serving all. For true charity is humble, and true humility is charitable.

SECT. IV.—CHILDREN.—HE WHO IS NOT AGAINST CHRIST IS FOR HIM.—A CUP OF WATER.

36. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,

The character, and even the emblem of humility, is dear to Christ. Who does not envy the good fortune of this child? Who would not have wished to be in his place? But it is far more advantageous to be embraced in the arms of his love than in those of his flesh. The greater our simplicity and humility are, the greater share shall we have in his tenderness and affection.

37. Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

The education of children is one part of that which is here so forcibly recommended by Jesus Christ. Those who have

the spirit of simplicity, humility, and Christian childhood, deserve to be most regarded and assisted by virtuous people, because they are treated worst by the world. We ought to look upon Christ and his Father as present in those whom we serve and assist. The recommendation of some great person is more sought after and considered by men, than that of Christ. Whoever has faith, judges after a very different manner.

38. ¶ And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us; and we forbade him, because he followeth not us.

That which John here does is an example of an indiscreet zeal for the interests of Christ. The most holy persons have sometimes occasion to secure themselves from secret emulations. We very easily mingle our own interests with those of God; and our vanity uses the glory of his name only as a veil. A preacher sometimes imagines that his only desire is that men should follow Christ, and adhere to his word; and it is himself whom he desires they should follow, and to whom he is very glad to find them adhere. John has fewer imitators of that perfect freedom from self-interest, which he had after the descent of the Holy Ghost, than he has of this defect in his state of imperfection. A man willingly approves the good which is done by others, when he loves good for its own sake, and God for his.

39. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.

Christ suffers many things in his church which are done without his mission, but he makes them contribute to the establishment of his kingdom. Whatever reason we may have to fear that some persons will not persevere in goodness, we must, notwithstanding, suffer them to continue their endeavours, when they appear to be any ways useful. God himself authorizes such persons, since it is he who performs the good in them. It is to make the world promote and carry on God's work for a man, to engage worldly people to do good, or to favour the church. And this is sometimes even a beginning of their salvation.

40. For he that is not against us is on our part.

Why should any one suspect evil in the heart, when in outward appearance there is nothing but what is good? It is very much for the interests of God and his truth, not to have some certain persons for his declared enemies; it is imprudence not to preserve and improve this advantage.

41. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

The very smallest services done to our neighbour shall be rewarded. The intention and design which we have of doing them to Christ in his members or ministers, does wonderfully enhance the value of them before God. They often say, in the world, "Such a person has recommended him to me:" but when does any one say, "God, Christ, or the gospel recommends this poor afflicted wretch, this business, this oppressed person:" "Such a one belongs to Jesus Christ; I owe him not only a cup of water, but my assistance, my protection, and, if there be occasion, even my life itself?"

SECT. V.—OFFENCE.—THE NEVER-DYING WORM AND UNQUENCHABLE FIRE.—SALT AND PEACE.

42. And whosoever shall offend one of *these* little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

A man offends, or gives occasion of scandal to his brother, his own family, and the church, not only by giving a bad example, but also in suffering that in them which it is in his power to remove; or by not giving a good example when he can and ought. Whoever refuses to bear this light yoke of charity, shall be oppressed with the weight of God's justice, and cast headlong into hell. He who can excuse himself in not having a cup of water to give his brother, cannot excuse himself from giving him a good example, or at least from not giving him a bad one. This is the most indispensable duty of Christian charity.

43. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire

that never shall be quenched: 44. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

How short and slight is the pleasure of a criminal touch; and it is purchased at the price of an eternal and inconceivable pain! He to whom the management of the public money becomes a hinderance of salvation, or an occasion of sin, ought he to deliberate whether he shall cut off this hand or not? Every use of the hand, every employment, state, and kind of work whereby a livelihood is gained, are so many hands which are to be cut off, when they are inconsistent with salvation.

45. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

The cutting off of the foot is the breaking off all commerce with the world by a holy retirement, whenever it becomes necessary to salvation. To quit the occasions of falling is not a counsel of perfection, but a necessary duty, since salvation depends upon it.

46. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Who can conceive the torment of this gnawing worm, namely, of the eternal reproach of conscience, when a man shall reflect upon the graces and mercies of God which he has despised, and on the preference he has made of the shadow of a momentary happiness before a substantial and eternal good, which is God himself!

47. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

What precautions do we not take to avoid an infectious air, and to prevent a contagious distemper from spreading! How much greater reason have we to shun those persons who are to us an occasion of sin, were they, on the account of their advice, protection, and assistance, as dear to us as our hands, our feet, and our eyes! How much more still ought we to cut off all criminal, unprofitable, and dangerous use of our senses, our mind, and our body!

48. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

These words, repeated three times, are as so many admo-

nitions to avoid the last, great, general, and eternal excommunication which will separate the sinner from all happiness, and overwhelm him with all internal and external miseries, denoted here by the worm and the fire. Let us hearken to this wholesome advice of our blessed Saviour, while as yet this worm may be crushed by the contrition of our heart, and this fire extinguished by the tears of our repentance.

49. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.

See here the greatness, multiplicity, and eternity of the pains of the damned! They suffer without being able to die, they are burned without ever being consumed, they are sacrificed without being sanctified, and salted with the fire of hell, as eternal victims of the divine justice. We must of necessity be sacrificed to God after one manner or another in the state of eternity: and we have now the choice, either of the unquenchable fire of his justice, or of the everlasting flame of his love.

50. Salt *is* good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

The salt of Christian wisdom, which consists in having a relish only of heavenly things, ought to be very quick and lively in priests. It belongs to them to impart this relish to others; but, if they have once lost it, how difficultly is it recovered! This relish and this wisdom seldom return, when the relish and wisdom of the world have taken their place. True wisdom produces humility, and humility preserves peace. O Jesus, eternal wisdom, wholesome salt of the soul, pattern of Christian humility, and source of true peace, vouchsafe to give me a relish of God, humility and peace; preserve in me whatever comes from thee, and consume the corruption which proceeds from myself!

CHAPTER X.

SECT. I.—MARRIAGE INDISSOLUBLE.

1. And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again.

A true pastor is never weary of instructing his people. He is always ready to communicate himself, because the treasure of his heart is always full of the truths of salvation. His known charity causes people to seek and apply themselves to him, and this search and concourse invite and solicit his charity. Kindle, O Lord, this double zeal, both in the pastors and in the sheep!

2. ¶ And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away *his* wife? tempting him.

Thus some good pastors, intent on feeding the flock of God, find themselves opposed by pragmatical persons, and their sheep disturbed with contentious and malicious questions. Every age has its Pharisees, of whom the devil makes use to tempt the pastors, and whom God permits to do it, in order to prove the faithful. Lord, do not permit their trial to be above their strength; and vouchsafe to be thyself their strength and their light!

3. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?

In order to free the church from the maxims of corrupt morality, it is sufficient to refer the followers thereof to the holy Scripture: it is by this divine word that we must examine all questions which arise in the church. The way to puzzle and confound innovators, is to oblige them to explain and prove their opinions by holy writ.

4. And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put *her* away.

A loose casuist generally wants either knowledge or sincerity. This conduct of the Pharisees is but too frequently imitated, who, being called upon to produce the primitive law

published by Moses, "He shall cleave to his wife," suppress it, to insist upon a doctrine which was only tolerated, and to fix upon a dispensation of this law which had been extorted, as it were, by force. Men often substitute, in the room of the holy law of the gospel, a toleration of some things which corruption of manners has introduced contrary to the gospel itself.

5. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.

A precept not to divorce, but to write a bill concerning it, which might allay the warmth of a sudden desire, and give at least time to consider more calmly of it. There is much more reason for men to humble themselves, than to boast on account of dispensations, when they are granted only "for the hardness of their hearts." God does by no means authorize every thing which he tolerates; and he frequently permits a less evil that a greater may be avoided. It is absolutely necessary to distinguish in the Scripture that which God commands, that which he counsels, that which he expressly permits, and that which, out of his infinite patience, he only tolerates or suffers.

6. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

In the defence of the truth and morality of the gospel we must, after Christ's example, not wander from the subject, but always keep close to the natural order, to the divine institution, and to the sacred text; and run things back to their source and original.

7. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; 8. And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.

Marriage between one man and one woman carries in it singularity and inseparable society, friendship and inviolable fidelity, unity and unalterable community. What weighty reasons, then, ought there to be for proceeding to a divorce, after so express a commandment of God, and so forcible a reason laid down? For whose sake shall a man and woman

part, if they are not permitted to do it for the sake of father or mother?

9. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

There are four sorts of marriage which cannot be dissolved, whereof the first is an emblem of the rest: between man and woman, between the Word and the human nature, between Christ and his church, and between God and his elect in heaven. It is a shameful perfidiousness in civil life, to break off a friendship which is within the verge of our power; it is a crime in religion, to violate the conjugal friendship, of which God is the author, Jesus Christ the pattern, and the Holy Ghost the bond, and which the end of marriage, the education of children, the peace of families, and the public good render necessary.

10. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same *matter*. 11. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. 12. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

The union of marriage honours and resembles that of Christ with his church, which he will never forsake to take another, as she will never forsake him. God suffered divorce in the synagogue, to signify the future repudiation thereof; he re-established the indissolubility of marriage in the church, to show that she is the inseparable spouse of Jesus Christ. It is upon this account that the adulterer does, by his lewdness and injustice, particularly dishonour Christ and his church, whose mysterious figure he so shamefully violates and abuses.

SECT. II.—LITTLE CHILDREN BLESSED.

13. ¶ And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and *his* disciples rebuked those that brought *them*.

Children are the fruit of marriage; their Christian education, and the care of presenting them to Christ, that they may become his members, is the end thereof. They are an unhappy fruit, if they are not presented to our blessed Saviour; and if he does not touch them by blessing them, and

uniting them to himself by his Spirit of adoption, in order to make them members of his body.

14. But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.

Nothing is more acceptable to God than great simplicity, how much soever it is despised by the world. It is to the simple and sincere that God communicates himself; them he vouchsafes to honour with a near access to his majesty, and for them he designs his kingdom. The Christian childhood consists in having no more pride, impurity, resentment, craft, ambition, covetousness, and knowledge of evil, than children. It is this which renders us conformable, gives us admission, and unites us to Jesus Christ in his kingdom. What is here said is not by way of counsel, but it shows the absolute necessity of being such, at least in some degree, in order to be saved. It is Jesus Christ who says this;—can we entertain any manner of doubt concerning it?

15. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

To fall back into childhood is the decay of reason, and the greatest humiliation of man: but there is another childhood, which is the glory of a reasonable creature, and the perfection of reason itself; and this is to have the docility of a child in respect of the truths of the gospel. A child which is incapable of resisting grace, and is, as it were, a *rasa tabula* before God, affords a lively representation of that which grace is able to effect, even in the heart of an old sinner. If this grace were not all-powerful, who could ever hope for dispositions so contrary to the pride of man? Who could aspire to this kingdom? "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law."

16. And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them.

What care ought not men to take of children, for whom Christ expresses so great tenderness, whom he blesses, and takes under his own protection! The blessing of the Almighty cannot possibly be ineffectual, since he blesses none

but those he loves, and since his love produces the good effect which he requires. If children were incapable of grace and sanctification, what good could Christ do them? The church imitates her Head in admitting them to baptism, and opening her bosom to them.

SECT. III.—THE RICH YOUNG MAN.—THE DANGER OF RICHES.

17. ¶ And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

How advantageous is it frequently to ask at the feet of Christ what we must do in order to our salvation! It is an excellent practice, provided we perform it as we ought. He alone is capable of showing us the way to heaven, being himself the way; he alone is incapable of deceiving us, since he is the truth; and he alone is worthy to conduct us to eternal life, being himself that very life.

18. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God.

If the faith of the heart be not answerable to the confession of the mouth, the humility to the works, and the purity of the intention to the fervency of the action, a man may run to Christ, humble himself before him, and ask the best things in the world of him, without becoming at all better thereby. In order to pray after a truly Christian manner, it is necessary for us to be thoroughly convinced of our own misery, and that God only being the fulness of all goodness, it is through him only that we can become good.

19. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

The commandments of God afford us sufficient instruction: it is often nothing but curiosity that desires other lights. The law of God makes known his will; and it is by conforming ourselves thereto, that we partake of his goodness and holiness. Let thy law, O my God, be continually the rule of my behaviour and actions!

20. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

Under how great obligations to God does that person lie, whom he prepossesses from his youth with the love of his law! It is very dangerous for him not to have all the thankfulness which he ought for such a blessing, or to attribute that to himself which is due only to God. Youth passed in innocence is a very rare and precious gift; but it often happens that when a man has not known sin, he does not sufficiently know from whence virtue comes.

21. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

God cannot love any thing in us but only his own gifts; he alone can perfect those which he has bestowed upon us. It is sometimes of great advantage to us for him not to do this very soon, to the end that we may know at least, by the difficulty of what remains to be done, that what we have done already did not proceed from ourselves, but was a gift of God. If there be any one irregular inclination in the heart, this is the very thing which God requires us to sacrifice to him, without which our salvation is in great danger.

22. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Abundance of persons serve God with cheerfulness, until he requires them to sacrifice for his sake that which they love. A man thinks he loves God above all things, when at the same time, without being sensible of it, he loves a little money or some trifle more than God. Can we look upon riches as an advantage, when they are certainly an obstacle either to salvation, or at least to that perfection which God requires of us? This young man had been perhaps a saint, if he had been poor: so true is it that it is oftentimes a misfortune to be rich.

23. ¶ And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

Let Jesus Christ threaten the rich, and decry riches ever so much; the rich can by no means be persuaded to be afraid

of their condition, nor the poor not to envy it. Whoever will not believe wisdom itself, and the Author of salvation in the business of salvation, is resolved to shut his eyes and to perish. That which makes the danger the greater is, that men are either least or rather not at all afraid, in that state wherein they have most reason to be so. It is therefore no other than to turn our backs upon the kingdom of God, for us to have no other design but how to raise what the world calls a fortune, and to heap up riches upon riches.

24. And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

The poor are sooner astonished at these words than the rich are so much as moved by them: the reason is, because men see the danger of others better than their own. It is much easier for a man to be contented without those things which he has not, than to disengage himself from those which he possesses, and not to trust in them. The poor may find a sufficient ground of trust and confidence in their poverty, since the kingdom of God is theirs; but the rich have reason to tremble in the midst of their riches. Whoever finds in them his rest, his joy, and his happiness, never thinks of seeking for these things in God. And there lies the greatest misery.

25. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 26. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?

Experience shows but too plainly how difficult it is to root out of the heart the desire of perishing things. To do this is a greater miracle than to remove a mountain. The wealth of a covetous man is like food incorporated and changed into the substance of his heart: to take away the former is to tear out the latter. He alone can do this who has the heart of the covetous person in his hand, and can take out his stony heart, and give him one of flesh. The world is full of such as say one to another, "Who then can be saved?" and yet live as if it were the easiest thing imaginable.

27. And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men *it is* impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

It is the comfort of the humble that their salvation is in the hands of God; and it is the blindness of the proud that they would have theirs in their own. A true Christian is not at all alarmed to find here that without grace his salvation is impossible, because he knows that God can do every thing for him, and that he himself can do all things in God through Jesus Christ. Yes, O my God! to thee it does belong to work my salvation, because thou canst do all things in me; and to me to humble myself under thy almighty hand, because I can do nothing but by thee.

SECT. IV.—A HUNDRED-FOLD PROMISED.—PERSECUTIONS.—THE PASSION FORETOLD.

28. ¶ Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.

That man forsakes a great deal who, having but little, leaves it all for the sake of God, and desires nothing but him. It is a small thing to forsake external goods, if we do not forsake what is truly ours, our will and flesh, in sacrificing them to God by mortification. It is something indeed to strip ourselves; but if we design to follow Christ beyond the sea of this present world, we must, by strength of arm, cut our passage through the waves to that place where he expects us: that is, we must renounce and do violence to ourselves, in imitation of our head and pattern.

29. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, 30. But he shall receive a hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

Who could believe that he who leaves his kindred and estate, that he may not be deficient in faith, truth, and righteousness, and in that perfection which God requires of him, is rewarded even in this life? It is Jesus Christ who says it: it is, therefore, a matter of faith. One single degree of grace, which is a thousand times more valuable

than all which a man can leave for the sake of God, causes him to find a hundred-fold. Whoever can truly say that his faith staggers not at this article, and that he is ready to follow Christ at the expense of all, what may he not justly expect from God! It is very pleasant to serve a master who, in this world, makes his servants rich in poverty, full of joy in forsaking all things, and happy in the midst of persecutions; whereas worldly masters cannot secure their favourites from being miserable even in the midst of riches, pleasures, and the greatest prosperity.

31. But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first.

What is here said is commonly seen in times of persecution. A great sinner, who shows himself faithful to God, makes amends for his past infidelities, and rises even to the glory of martyrdom; whilst a virtuous person, who gives way, loses the fruit of all his good works. It is of the last importance for a man to be faithful to his duty on some singular occasion. This is often a decisive stroke, and causes very great alterations. How much greater still is that which is made at the hour of death betwixt a proud rich man and an humble beggar, a worldly person, and a true Christian!

32. ¶ And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him,

All nature trembles in a man, when God obliges him to take the way of the cross. Christ goes forward therein, with a firm and even pace, and with a true courage. He who hazards his life in hopes of a better fortune, exposes it only because he hopes not to lose it, and is but the more fond of it on this account; as a covetous person is really the fonder of riches the more he exposes to the hazard of gaming, on the prospect of greater gain. True courage consists in the contempt of this present life through the hopes of that which is eternal; and this contempt is so much the greater the more sure a man is of losing it, as Jesus Christ and the martyrs were.

33. *Saying*, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: 34. And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him; and the third day he shall rise again.

These two verses contain an abridgment of the passion of the Son of God. His admirable constancy at the sight of his sufferings does not proceed from insensibility or stupidity, but from his immutable affection toward his Father, and his inviolable adherence to his will. Let us, after the example of Christ, support ourselves under the prospect of the evils of this life, with the hopes of that which is to come. The exact accomplishment of this prediction, in all its parts, is an invincible proof both of the divinity of Christ and of the religion which he has established.

SECT. V.—ZEBEDEE'S CHILDREN.—THE CUP BEFORE THE GLORY.

35. ¶ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.

Such is the blindness of carnal man, that he would have God's will directed by his own. Worldly men, not altogether destitute of faith, are not for going directly contrary to the will of God, but they would fain have his designs fall in with their own, and, through this earnest desire, they act at last as if it were so. It is but a bad disposition for prayer, to begin it with prescribing to God what he ought to give us.

36. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?

He knew better than they that which was in their hearts; but it was proper that they should discover it themselves, in the presence of the rest, to the end that all might be instructed and set right. He seems disposed to grant them every thing, on purpose that they may have such trust and confidence in him, as to dissemble and hide nothing from him.

37. They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.

How little does man know wherein the kingdom of Christ consists, and the ways which lead thereto! Who is there

who does not perceive in his heart some degree, at least, of this irregular desire? It is injustice and pride to covet that which does not belong to us; and it is the spirit of the world. There men think of nothing but how to place themselves, without troubling themselves at all to consider whether they injure others, or whether they deserve that which they desire. Ambition supplies the place of merit; and every thing is just when it is advantageous.

38. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

Ambition is blind, and often knows neither what it does nor what it desires, because it professes to consult neither reason nor faith. We think of nothing but human greatness, because we have no perfect knowledge of the true. The love of sufferings and of the cross ought to be the measure of our hopes and desires. No other way leads to glory but that of mortification and the cross. There are inward mortifications, which pierce the heart, expressed here by the cup which is to be drank of; and there are outward, denoted by the baptism. We must have no small degree of faith and of the love of God, to look upon these things as no other than an agreeable and delicious draught, or as a refreshing and wholesome bath.

39. And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:

The ambitious person finds nothing difficult, provided he can but raise himself. He easily presumes upon that which he cannot perform to obtain that which he cannot deserve. It was but a moment ago, and these men were seized with fear and amazement at the bare sight of the way to Jerusalem: but one passion weakens another, and, like a burning fever, supplies a man with fresh strength and courage.

40. But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared.

Jesus Christ is a priest, or, rather, a high-priest, who knows not what it is to prefer his friends or relations upon

carnal motives, or to satisfy their ambition. He makes them partakers of his cross; but, as to glory, he refers them for that to his Father. As the cross is the only way whereby we can arrive at glory, to promise a persevering love for the former is no other than to promise the latter. Grant, O Jesus! that we may both live and die with thee under the banner of the cross.

SECT. VI.—IMPERIOUSNESS FORBID.

41. And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be much displeased with James and John.

The ambition of clergymen is a great scandal in the church, and is frequently an occasion of emulations, enmities, divisions, schisms, and wars: of all which the displeasure and indignation of the apostles give us an imperfect shadow and resemblance. If apostles, trained up with so much care in the school of charity and humility, notwithstanding, are not free from this vice, what effects will not ambition produce in souls wholly immersed in flesh and blood, which have no motion but from their passions—no law but that of their own desires?

42. But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. 43. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

Observe here the spirit and rule of ecclesiastical government: much humility, instruction, and condescension; no dominion, imperiousness, or harshness. Men strangely forget themselves when, in a ministry appointed only for the sake of heaven, they are for contending with the great ones of the earth in haughtiness and grandeur. It is very difficult to support equally the double character of a spiritual pastor and a temporal prince; and to join humility with grandeur, meekness with dominion, and the constant application of a pastor to the duties of his function with the care of secular affairs.

44. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

The greatest prelate in the church is he who is most conformable to the example of Christ by humility, charity, and

continual attendance on his flock, and who looks upon himself as a servant to the children of God. We do not know what it is to serve one single soul for the sake of God in the spirit of the holy servitude of Christ. It is something far more honourable than proudly to command whole nations, and to govern empires. God requires nothing more of his chief ministers than that which men do every day in order to raise themselves, which is, to become the servants of all: but the one is a servitude of charity, the other of concupiscence.

45. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

To serve and to die,—this is all which Christ came into the world to do. There is no slave who serves his master as this divine Master served his slaves. After such an example as this, and under such a head, a Christian, and much more a clergyman, should not reflect, without some confusion, upon the necessity under which he lies of being served by others. It is good to dispense as much as possible with the service of others, and to exact none but after such a manner is conformable to the spirit of the gospel, and to the example of the Prince of pastors. A man ought continually to serve or minister in the work of salvation, as our blessed Lord did; and to spare neither his health nor his life to contribute to the saving of one soul: this is a duty belonging to the pastoral office, upon which he ought to reckon before he undertakes it. O sovereign Pastor of souls! renew in thy church the spirit and zeal of thy sacerdotal servitude, so little known, and much less put in practice.

SECT. VIII.—THE BLIND MAN OF JERICHO CURED.

46. ¶ And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimeus, the son of Timeus, sat by the highway side begging.

In the cure of this blind man, let us reflect upon man delivered from blindness of heart, indigence, and impotency, by the mysteries of Christ's life. Blindness and indigence are not always found together in the blind of body; but they are never asunder in the spiritually blind. Faith is, at the

same time, both the eye and life of the soul; and truth is the light and bread of the heart. O eternal truth! O heavenly bread! grant that I may be always sensible how much I stand in need of thee, that I may know thee, go to thee, and feed upon thee.

47. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, *thou* Son of David, have mercy on me.

That which a sinner ought to observe in the cure of his soul is—(1.) To know his own blindness, and to be willing to be delivered from it. (2.) To have recourse to the sovereign Physician. (3.) To pray to him with fervency. (4.) To trust only in his mercy. The cure is far advanced when once a man begins to cry out after his deliverer and physician; he is already freed from a great part of his misery when he is become so sensible as to have recourse to mercy. It is thou, O God of mercies! who hast prevented me in my blindness, and taught me to call upon thee, and to lay before thee my misery.

48. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, *Thou* Son of David, have mercy on me.

The sinner in his conversion ought—(5.) Not to hearken to the world, nor to those who would discourage or divert him from his design, but to pray with the greater earnestness. This blind man is already well enlightened. He knows that the opportunities of recovering sight do not present themselves every day, and that therefore he must not let them slip. Truth does not always come to us a second time: he who lets it pass away from him, is not sure of finding it again. We sometimes hazard all by not adhering to it at first with constancy and perseverance.

49. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.

The sinner in his conversation ought—(6.) To have a man of God to conduct him to Christ, and encourage him under his weakness. What joy and comfort is it to a penitent when he sees that the divine mercy is moved by his misery; that it stands still, as it were, on his account, and hears his

prayers! Hope is firmly established in the heart by prayer, and supplies a man with courage to go to God when he calls him in that manner which is always effectual.

50. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.

He ought—(7.) To cast away immediately all outward impediments which retard the effect of his resolutions. (8.) To obey him who speaks to him on the part of God; and to rise up in order to go near his Saviour, by walking in the way of good works and of his commandments. (9.) To run to him without delay, and with an ardent faith. The blind man stands before Jesus without seeing him, yet he believes and hopes in him; which gives us a representation of this life, wherein our cure is wrought under the obscurity of faith. We shall see this adorable truth, which is at present veiled from our sight, when once our cure shall be perfected, our eyes opened, and the darkness of faith changed into the light of glory.

51. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord,* that I might receive my sight. [* *Fr.* Cause me to see.]

The sinner in his conversion ought—(10.) To forget all other wants, and to mention none but those of his soul, in begging mercy. That mercy which the blind man here asks is, that Christ, by his almighty power, would be pleased to work a cure in him, and give him eyes capable of seeing. In like manner, that which every one who prays to God as he ought, asks in proportion, is the operation of his grace in the heart. Observe here the perfect agreement of grace with free-will. God, by his all-powerful will, works upon the will of man, which is denoted by these expressions,—"that I should do unto thee;"—"cause me to see." The will of man gives its consent thereto, wills it, and asks for it, signified by these words,—"What wilt thou?"—"Lord, cause me to see."

52. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

In the last place, the sinner, after he has received his cure, observing the rules of justice, ought to be full of acknowledg-

ment, and to follow Christ by imitating him throughout the whole course of this life. This blind man's faith made him whole, and saved him; but it was the Saviour himself who gave him this faith. The Scripture, and Christ himself, speak both of cures and of dispositions which qualify for them, because these dispositions are no less a gift of God than the cures themselves, and it is a matter of faith that he is the author of both. My God, I acknowledge with joy that thou canst not crown any thing in me except thy own gifts; and that I have nothing to offer to thee but what I have received from thee.

CHAPTER XI.

SECT. I.—CHRIST'S ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

1. And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethpage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples,

Christ, as the victim of God, comes to present himself at the place of sacrifice. This is not the action of a mere man, to go thus calmly, in cold blood, to deliver himself up to his enemies, and to meet certain death. It is thus, O Jesus! that thou introducest into the world a new philosophy, which consists in the folly of the cross, the contempt of life, and the desire of death. Lord, let this spirit of sacrifice fill the hearts of Christians, and make them become true victims!

2. And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring *him*.

This colt is a figure of the Gentiles, a people without any yoke or law, to whom Christ was to send his apostles; and this action denotes the calling of them, which we see continually fulfilled, even in our own days, by missionaries and bishops truly apostolical. God sometimes sends preachers very far for a small number of his elect, who have no knowledge of him, and are tied fast with the cords of sin, and have never borne the yoke of any law.

3. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.

The need which the Lord declares he has of this colt is, that he may show himself to the people as the true paschal victim which is necessary for them; that he may prefigure the triumph of his grace over all nations; and teach all prelates, after his example, to retain the marks of modesty and humility in the midst of the splendour of their dignity, and to renounce all excess by yielding to necessity.

4. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him.

It is no small proof of the faith of these disciples, who were as yet imperfect, to expose themselves to the insults of men, in obedience to their Master. They run the risk of being counted no better than thieves: there are, therefore, some occasions on which it is necessary for a man to hazard his reputation, as well as his life, in order to perform the will of God.

5. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? 6. And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go.

Nothing resists the word of the God-man, nor the faith and obedience of a faithful disciple. Let us learn to avoid all arguing and disputing whenever God commands us something above our strength; and to put our whole confidence in the power of his will, which can do all things. He accustoms his apostles to see that the wills of men are less in their own power than in that of God, and that his word is almighty, even in the mouth of his ministers, to the end that men may believe them.

7. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him.

It is the duty of a priest to bring those souls to Christ whom, by his power, he has loosed from their sins; to spare nothing within his capacity to cover and secure them from the malice of the devil and the world; and to dispose them to bear the yoke of Christ and his gospel. This is the way to make them bear a part in the triumphs of our blessed Saviour. Let us carry Christ in our hearts, and suffer ourselves to be

guided by him in the road to the heavenly Jerusalem, if we desire ever to arrive there with him. But let us remember, that it will be in vain for us to undertake to do this, unless he himself vouchsafe to carry and support us by his grace.

8. And many spread their garments in the way; and others cut down branches off the trees, and strewed *them* in the way.

A man may justly be said to lay all at and under the feet of Christ, when he looks upon all the things of this world with contempt, and freely parts with them to win Christ. The shortest and safest way to the heavenly Jerusalem is, for men to strip themselves of their possessions, (represented here by garments,) and to trample under foot all worldly hopes, (denoted by the branches of the trees,) in order to give reception to Christ, and to make him triumph in their hearts by apostolical and evangelical perfection.

9. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord: 10. Blessed *be* the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.

Whatever was done before the incarnation, and whatever has happened since, was all designed to be subservient only to Christ and to his glory. He cometh in the name of his Father; he is the true David; and his kingdom is a kingdom of suffering upon earth, and of glory in heaven. When shall we behold this glorious kingdom, which the true Israelites expect, for which the children of God daily pray to their heavenly Father? when shall we sing a hosanna, to be followed with an eternal hallelujah?

11. And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

Christ teaches kings and conquerors to lay down at the foot of the altar all the glory wherewith they are encircled. They ought ultimately to refer to God all the praises which are given them; to dedicate to him all their grandeur; frequently to pour out their hearts before him in the house of prayer, and to offer them up to him, in order to empty and purify them from all the vanity which praise is apt to inspire, and to beg of him the grace not to suffer themselves to be

poisoned therewith. It is neither a wandering mind nor curiosity which causes Christ "to look round about upon all things" in the temple, but a zeal for his Father's glory and for his house, which makes him search and examine into every thing which may be therein contrary to the purity of his worship, and to the edification of his people. This is a pattern for bishops, archdeacons, pastors, visitors, etc.

SECT. II.—THE FIG TREE CURSED.—THE BUYERS AND SELLERS CAST OUT OF THE TEMPLE.—THE POWER OF PRAYER.

12. ¶ And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:

The true hunger of Christ, of which this is only the figure, is his ardent desire of the salvation of men. His bodily hunger plainly shows that the day of his triumph was to him a day of fasting and mortification. How different are his festival days from those of the world, in which sensuality and debauchery seem to triumph!

13. And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not *yet*.

The faith, hope, charity, and good works of the faithful are the fruits with which Christ satisfies his hunger. Words, promises, barren desires, and outward performances alone are but useless and unprofitable leaves, upon which he does not feed. Christ does not, either through ignorance, seek for fruit where there is none, or through injustice, desire to find it when there can be none: but he does all this out of wisdom and goodness, on purpose to raise in us, by this figure, a just apprehension of that day when he will come to examine our lives, and when there will be no longer any time for the performance of good works. In order to have some at that day, we must labour during our whole life.

14. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard *it*.

Christ punishes a tree, to make us conclude that he would have us understand somewhat else thereby. God would find in us some fruits of righteousness at the hour of death,

though that is not the time to begin to produce them. After death there are no more good works, there is no more mercy; nothing is to be found but wrath, barrenness, and malediction for the wicked.

15. And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves;

Every one of the faithful is the temple of God, and therefore ought to have the same zeal for the purity of his own heart which Christ had for the sanctity of the visible temple. Avarice, self-interest, fondness for temporal things, and all other lusts of this life which fill the heart, are the buyers and sellers which must be cast out of this house of God, consecrated by baptism for the offering up of prayer and adoration to him, and glorifying his name. He who, instead of seeking the glory of God by the works of a free and disinterested charity, seeks therein the applause of men, is a trader who seeks a temporal and earthly gain, and not a Christian who seeks God, and worships him in spirit and in truth.

16. And would not suffer that any man should carry *any* vessel through the temple.

Let us imitate this zeal of Christ for the sanctity of God's house. The severity which he exercises against the profaners of the figurative temple, is but a shadow of that fury with which he will punish in hell all those who profane the living temples by their impurities, their own hearts by their vices, the churches by their irreverence and impieties, and the priesthood of Christ by ambition, by the scandalous merchandise of benefices, and by corruption of manners.

17. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.

The prelates, after Christ's example, ought always to join the instruction of sinners with the punishment of sin. The church is the place where the divine commerce of religion is carried on between God and man, the band of which is prayer; and where man ought to give himself entirely to God, as God

therein gives himself entirely to man. He who does it not is a murderer of his own soul, and a thief who robs God of his right. None but the church can "be called of all nations the house of prayer:" and therefore none but that can be the house of God. The more a Christian applies himself to prayer, the more his heart is the house of God, in which he lives and does every thing in his presence.

18. And the scribes and chief priests heard *it*, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.

Truth always makes a division among men. Some think of nothing but to persecute and suppress it, while others admire, love, embrace, and practise it. It is a dreadful thing to see here who they are who take the resolution to destroy it, without doubt not imagining they were doing it, but really believing themselves on its side. There are some particular seasons in which it is almost necessary for a man to lie concealed in the crowd of people, to prevent his having any hand in the persecution of truth. That which a man is hindered from doing against it by nothing but fear alone, is already done in the heart.

19. And when even was come, he went out of the city. 20. ¶ And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

Whoever is cursed of God for not having performed good works, is no longer good for any thing but to be cast into the fire as a dry stick. The root of faith remains, during this life, in wicked Christians who have not the fruits of it; but after death there is no more faith, no more hope of fruit, the root itself being dried up. It is frequently dried up even in this life, when no care is taken to cultivate it by Christian vigilance, and to water it with prayer.

21. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.

One of the subjects to which holy persons apply themselves, is to adore the terrible judgments of the divine justice on the wicked, while these only blaspheme against it. The tree withers away because it was cursed; but it was cursed only because it was unfruitful: whereas when it bore fruit, it

was the blessing of God which made it fruitful. Thus it is from the eternal benediction of God that the fruit of good works in the elect does proceed; but it is the want of good works which is the cause of his malediction upon the reprobate.

22. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

Let us admire the efficacy of faith or trust in God, and the force of prayer which is derived from it. That trust or confidence which obtains miracles, is neither wavering nor presumptuous, neither inactive nor too forward. It is very rare for a man to have a will so closely united to God as to have, as it were, a right to be assured of his without the least doubt, when it is useful or necessary for his glory; but then he has need of abundance of grace, not to fall from confidence into presumption. A slothful confidence which does not pray with earnestness, and an eager faith which seems to impose a law on God, are equally unworthy to be favoured with a miracle.

23. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

The power of God is ours when our heart is entirely his by a faith which is lively and free from all distrust or doubtfulness. This is the fruit of that holy and faithful friendship which the Holy Ghost forms between God and the saints, and which consists in desiring only the very same things. Nothing is more or less difficult in respect of him who can equally do all things, and whom nothing is able to resist.

24. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.

We obtain every thing of a father, when we address ourselves to him with the confidence of children, because then love prays in us; and God can refuse nothing to that. God promises every thing, without the least exception or reserve, to prayer; because the Holy Spirit, who prays in the saints, knows what he is to ask for them, and cannot possibly ask any thing but what is holy. Since it is the will of God which,

in praying like Christians, we desire in and above all things, a Christian prayer is always heard.

25. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

He who carries along with him to his prayers a spirit of dissension, bitterness, and revenge, brings back nothing but his own condemnation. Christ could not possibly have more plainly given us to understand that it is charity which must pray, and that God hears nothing besides, than by requiring this virtue of us before all things, which reconciles us both to God and man. The first grace and favour which God confers on sinners, is the pardon and forgiveness of their sins: but then this forgiveness belongs only to those who forgive.

26. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

We must have the heart of a brother toward our neighbour, if we desire God should have that of a Father toward us. If the dread of being disinherited by such a Father, and of losing such an inheritance, do not move a revengeful person, he never had the least notion of what it is to possess God, or what it is to lose him. One cannot lose him as a Father and as an inheritance, without having him for an enemy and a judge. What madness is it for a man to choose rather to suffer the vengeance of God to all eternity, than to lay aside his own, which can neither last a long time nor do abundance of hurt!

SECT. III.—BY WHAT AUTHORITY.

27. ¶ And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, 28. And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?

Those who find themselves vanquished by truth generally endeavour to reject authority. There are no persons more forward to demand of others a reason for their actions, than those who think they may do every thing themselves without control. Blind priests! who see not the finger of God, nor his divine authority in the visible and innumerable miracles

of Christ, which plainly authorize his mission and his conduct, and evidently prove his divinity. Ignorant scribes! who talk of nothing but the Scriptures and the law, and yet do not perceive in Christ the author and the perfection, the end and accomplishment, the spirit and the truth of the law, as all the Scriptures declare him to be.

29. And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30. The baptism of John, was *it* from heaven, or of men? answer me.

An answer worthy of the wisdom of God! Had he answered that his authority came from God, he must have proved it, either by his past miracles, against which their malice had hardened them, or by new ones, of which they were altogether unworthy, and which they would likewise have evaded. The shortest and surest way is to force them either to acknowledge the testimony given by John, or to see themselves reduced to a shameful silence. By obliging heretics and irreligious persons to explain their own opinions, one cannot fail of gaining considerably, by the advantage they will give to the cause of truth, though against their inclination.

31. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? 32. But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all *men* counted John, that he was a prophet indeed.

What shifts and evasions does the spirit of Adam seek, that it may avoid yielding to the truth! When a man can no longer withstand the force of it, but only by insincerity, dissimulation, and artifice, he is convinced, but not converted. Miserable condition this! for men to set themselves in opposition to truth with the greater obstinacy the more they know it; and to employ that very light which reason receives from truth, to defend themselves against the light of truth itself!

33. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Christ discovers not himself to hypocrites. That man is altogether unworthy of the truth who seeks it only to oppose

it. It is to no manner of purpose to dispute and reason with those who study only how to ensnare in their discourse, and to take advantage of every thing against truth. Such persons show plainly what concern they have for truth, when they make use of lies and forgeries to oppress it. Humility does not oblige any one to give an account of his conduct to all sorts of persons, nor at all times, nor in all circumstances, but only to be ready to do it whenever the glory of God and the benefit of his neighbour require it.

CHAPTER XII.

SECT. I.—THE HUSBANDMEN MURDERERS.—THE CORNER-STONE REJECTED.

1. And he began to speak unto them by parables. A *certain* man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about *it*, and digged *a place for* the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.

The soul, according to one figurative sense of this parable, is the vineyard of God. When he created it, he planted it; he set a hedge about it, which is that of his commandments. The winepress is the representative sacrifice which causes the blood of Christ to flow into it. The tower is the church, the house of prayer, in which the soul, being raised from the earth, is secure from its enemies, and finds in the word of God arms strong enough to overcome them. Our soul is not our own; God, who is the creator, is likewise the proprietor of it. We hold it of him, as it were by lease, only that we may cultivate it, and render to him the fruits which it is capable of producing by his grace. Let us take great care that we be not found, either not having any at all, or claiming the property of them to ourselves.

2. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. 3. And they caught *him*, and beat him, and sent *him* away empty.

The fruit and product of our vineyard is no other than to

worship and serve him who gave it us, and to keep his commandments in resisting our evil inclinations. It is very just that he should receive of the fruit of the vineyard, since it belongs to him, and since he is at all the charge and expense of the workmanship by his grace. The divine law, inspirations, and good motions, are, as it were, the first servants whom God sends to us, to demand the fruit or product of his vineyard. We abuse these when we despise and reject good thoughts and desires, and render them useless and ineffectual, instead of hearkening to and obeying them.

4. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully handled.

The Scripture is the second servant sent from God to receive the fruit of his vineyard. To contemn the authority of it through pride, not to believe it through incredulity, to contradict and withstand the truths contained in it out of a spirit of opposition, to neglect the reading of it through slothfulness, and not to obey it through worldly and carnal affection, is a most heinous offence, when it is voluntary, and in a matter of importance. The Scripture is a letter from our heavenly Father. We have but little reverence for such a Father, or love for our heavenly country, when we despise, neglect, or disrespect the letters which come to us from thence.

5. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some.

The labours of the apostles and their successors, the exhortations of the pastors, and the examples of the saints, are the third servant sent by the Lord of the vineyard. It is a dreadful thing to make no use of all these, to show no gratitude for them, to hate the persons on the account of the truth, to despise or hate the truths which they deliver, and to trample them under foot: these are, in the sight of God, so many outrages and murders, which will be severely punished. How much more heinous is it then to persecute them?

6. Having yet therefore one son, his well beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.

At length the Son of God himself, as the only Son of the

Lord of the vineyard, is sent in the incarnation and in the eucharist, in his name to retake possession of our heart, which is his vineyard, and to receive from it the fruit of his graces. We should be very sensibly affected were but any thing of the like nature with this parable to happen in our sight, even though a father should send his son only for his own interest; and yet we are altogether insensible as to that which faith teaches us concerning the only Son of God, sent into the world, and humbled by his Father, purely for our salvation. This ought to convince us that our faith is very weak, and that our salvation is little regarded by us.

7. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. 8 And they took him, and killed *him*, and cast *him* out of the vineyard.

All deadly sins are so many murders of Jesus Christ. It seems as if sinners had conspired to kill him by innumerable deaths. The Jews killed him only when he was mortal; wicked Christians crucify him afresh, even now that he is become all-glorious and immortal. That man renders himself guilty of shedding his blood, who, by sacrilegious communions, receives the representation of it unworthily. To sin, is to renew his death, since it was by sin only that he died.

9. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.

The hour of death and judgment is a dreadful hour, which we do not sufficiently hear. All is lost to a sinner when he once leaves this world; he has no longer a right to any thing, he is not master of any thing, no, not even of his own soul, which is forfeited to the justice of God, and delivered up to the devil as the eternal executioner of that eternal justice.

10. And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner:

Happy is that person, who with Christ patiently bears the contempts, affronts, and persecution of sinners in this life: for he shall certainly have a share in his exaltation and glory. Christ is to his church a stone, which is solid by his immortality, white by his purity: a principal one, as being her head; a foundation-stone, as author and finisher of the faith;

and a corner-stone, as being the band and union of all his members. They whose business it is to build the spiritual edifice, are sometimes so unhappy as to reject the most lively and excellent stones. But God will certainly take care to reserve them their proper place, and to put them into the building.

11. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

It is the joy of the righteous to employ their minds with admiration on the divine qualities of the Son of God, on the mysteries of his life, and the wonders which he has wrought, in order to the redemption of mankind, and to the establishment of his church. Whoever has a true relish of faith, finds no manner of difficulty in depriving himself of the vain amusements of this world and of unprofitable studies, that he may replenish his mind and heart with the truths of religion, and make the most excellent knowledge of Christ and his church his chief pleasure and delight. "This is the Lord's doing," it is his work, and that which is most worthy of him; why then should we be so foolish as to seek elsewhere after something which may be more worthy of us?

12. And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people; for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.

The wicked think of nothing but how to destroy Christ within them by sin, whereas the saints seek him upon earth, and adore him in heaven. It is something to be so wise as to know when truths are directed to us; but to make no other use of them than to be provoked thereby, is the property of the reprobate. God makes use of human motives, of the fear and the other passions of the wicked, to put a stop to their fury, and suspend the execution of their evil designs, until the very moment in which he has determined to leave them to themselves, and to permit them to act as they please. We need only open our eyes to find sufficient cause to adore the like conduct of God in all places, at all times, and on innumerable occasions.

SECT. II.—GOD AND CESAR.

13. ¶ And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in *his* words.

The worldly-minded, and the great pretenders to devotion, do but too often combine together against the truth. It is very common for those who can no longer hold out against the force of truth, to make use, in order to silence the defenders of it, of such as have great credit and reputation in the world, either by reason of their profession of piety, or of their authority.

14. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man; for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Cesar, or not? 15. Shall we give, or shall we not give?

The hypocrisy of these men causes them to make use of truth itself in order to destroy it; and truth makes use of their own words to confound them. Praise is a very dangerous snare. It is a virtue to praise good men, when it is done without any prejudice to truth, and when the intention is good; but it is no other than flattery, when praise, though ever so well-grounded, is given with an ill design. Generosity and zeal are virtues which are essential in a minister of Christ; but for such a one to value himself on the account of his zeal and generosity, is a dangerous vice, which may spoil all his other virtues. It is not sufficient for a man "to teach the way of God in truth," but he must do it likewise in charity and prudence; having a regard to persons, not with respect to the matter of the truths, but to the manner of speaking them.

But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see *it*. 16. And they brought *it*. And he saith unto them, Whose *is* this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Cesar's. 17. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

True piety alone knows how to render to God that which is due to him, without refusing to princes what belongs to them. It is our duty, neither to forbear speaking the truth through

fear of displeasing men, nor to speak it with a design to please them, nor to have any regard to the judgment they may pass either on our silence or our freedom, but to regard only the judgment of truth itself. The wicked do not indeed deserve that truth should be taught them, when they ask for it out of hypocrisy; but truth deserves to have testimony given to it, whenever its interest depends thereupon. God gives to the upright in heart the dexterity to avoid the snares of hypocrites, and to oblige even them to be instrumental in promoting the cause of truth.

SECT. III.—THE RESURRECTION, AND ANGELICAL STATE.

18. ¶ Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying,

The devil gives no truce or respite to the Christian, any more than his ministers did to Christ. When one temptation does not prevail, he immediately raises up another. Let watchfulness and prayer keep us continually in a readiness to fight against this enemy, and to avoid his snares.

19. Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave *his* wife *behind him*, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

Moses and the prophets, the priests and the doctors of the law, are dead, without raising up any children to God, having made only slaves by fear. Christ alone hath raised up some to him, because he brought with him the spirit of adoption, which is the love of God; but still in a greater number after his death, and by his brethren the apostles, who espoused the church in his name, as his proxies and vicars. Would to God that this heavenly spouse were given to none but the true brethren of Christ, who, by the conformity of their manners and conduct with his, and being filled with his zeal and spirit, might continually raise up children to God.

20. Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. 21. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. 22. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also.

Happy is she who has but one eternal husband, who shall never be taken from her by death, and who will make her

fruitful in good works! By such examples as this, God plainly shows that it is he who gives fruitfulness; and that, without his blessing, every thing is barren. Such a barrenness is likewise frequently the just punishment of irregular desires.

23. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.

How carnal are the thoughts of carnal men concerning the life of heaven, and how unworthy of that blessed state! We must lose all the ideas of whatever passes upon earth, in order to frame one which may at all come near the true nature of that eternal happiness. The creature shall belong only to its Creator; man shall live only for his God. She who, while she was on earth, left her father and mother to cleave to her husband, shall then leave both her husband and herself, to cleave eternally to God alone.

24. And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?

The carnal Jews did not know nor understand the Scriptures, because they comprehended not the spirit of them, but explained, according to the letter only, those spiritual and eternal promises which were wrapped up in the types and shadows of the law as in a veil. Thus they were far from comprehending the nature of that land of promise, which is the land of the living—of that Jerusalem of which God himself is the founder and builder—of that heavenly mountain where the eternal covenant of the chosen people with their God shall be perfected—of that glorious temple which is the bosom of God himself—of that tabernacle which the Lord hath pitched and not man—of that High Priest of good things to come, who is himself his own altar and sacrifice with his church—and of that promise which was to be fully accomplished only in heaven, namely, That they should be the people, disciples, and children of God; and that he would be their God, their Teacher, and their Father. Let us, if we can, comprehend the power of God, and then we shall easily comprehend how he will fulfil all this in his elect.

25. For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.

When man entire shall be once put into possession of all the rights belonging to the adoption of the children of God, he will then, without losing any thing of his nature, become altogether spiritual and heavenly; because the Holy Ghost will perfectly possess both his soul and his body. Every other alliance shall be annihilated, when that of the church with God shall be consummated. Let us, as much as possibly we can, begin here below the life of angels, by purity; by fidelity, in doing every thing as in the presence of God; by charity, and by the practice of all other divine virtues, to the end that we may continue it in heaven.

26. And as touching the dead, that they rise; have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? 27. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

God is pleased with the remembrance of those whom he has sanctified, and glories more in being called the God of two or three just persons, than the God of heaven and earth. God is, in a most peculiar manner, the God of these patriarchs, being their proper good, their inheritance, their crown, and exceeding great reward, which they are to possess in virtue of his promises: Gen. xv. 1. He is the supreme Good, or the "rewarder of them that diligently seek him," (Heb. xi. 6;) the God for whom Abraham and his children forsook all and gave all, (ver. 8, 17,) upon the prospect of the resurrection, (ver. 19,) and of the reward, (ver. 20;) the God of whom he expected something very different from the land of Canaan, in which he only "sojourned, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob," (ver. 9,) who always looked upon themselves as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," (ver. 13,) desiring earnestly that heavenly country wherein "he hath prepared for them a city," (ver. 16;) and it is upon this account that "he is not ashamed to be called their God."

Now God cannot be, in this sense, "the God of the dead," since he cannot be possessed by those who are no more, nor

be the proper good, inheritance, and reward of any but "the living."

Since, then, all these saints "died in faith, not having received" the good things which God had promised them with an oath, (ver. 13, 39,) and since God is faithful, and utterly incapable of failing in the performance of his word and promises, (chap. vi. 17, 18,) there must necessarily be another life, wherein the heirs of the divine promises may receive the effect of them, both in their souls, by which they are men, and in their bodies, without which they are not such, in which they received these promises, and with which, as the companions of their labours, they served God. The soul, therefore, must be immortal, and the body must be reunited to the soul by the resurrection, that they may together enjoy God as their reward, and possess him as their property and inheritance to all eternity.

SECT. IV.—THE LOVE OF GOD AND OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

28. ¶ And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commadment of all?

Among a great number of enemies to the truth, there is always found some person who receives it and profits thereby. God by this gives some comfort to an evangelical preacher. One truth, established and well rooted in the heart, produces in it a desire of knowing others. Nothing is more capable of inspiring men with the love of God's law, and of encouraging them to the practice of it, than the belief of another life, and of the resurrection of the dead, which supposes the immortality of the soul. Let us often draw near to Christ by prayer, and humbly beseech him to teach us this "first commandment of all," by speaking to our heart, and engraving it therein by his Spirit and his grace.

29. And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

Observe here in what true religion does consist: in hearing, believing, and loving God without reserve. The unity of God is the foundation thereof. Happy the people to whom

God made himself known, to whom he taught his law with his own mouth, and to whom he gave himself, had they but known, served, and loved him with all their heart! Happy that man to whom God has vouchsafed to impart the knowledge of his name, and of the Trinity of his persons, provided he be faithful and grateful, and serve him as the God of his heart! Say unto my soul, O Lord, that thou art my God, and my only God: but speak it as God, at the same time taking full possession of my heart, as the sole Lord and Master of it!

30. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this *is* the first commandment.

God will be loved in truth and with all the heart; and they know not what it is to love God who suffer themselves to be taken up with any thing whatever which may drive away, diminish, or divert that love which is due to him. It is by loving God that we serve and worship him in this life; it is by the same that we find and possess him in the other: and as we cannot possess him but with all our heart, so we must also love him with all our heart. It is love which gives motion to the heart, which inclines the soul as its bias, which fills the mind with thoughts, and which takes up and employs our whole strength. To the end, therefore, that all our motions, inclinations, thoughts, and strength may be directed to God, it is necessary that our whole love be the love of God.

31 And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

It is a duty to love our neighbour, if not as much as ourselves, at least in the same rank wherein we ought to love ourselves, desiring for him an exemption from the same evils, the enjoyment of the same good things, and, above all, of the sovereign, unchangeable, and eternal Good. There is no true love of our neighbour but the Christian love, which desires that he may enjoy God: for that alone can be true which desires for him the possession of that good which only can make him happy.

32. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

One only God requires one heart and one love. The sacrifice of faith and charity is the only sacrifice which can be worthy of God. Love in this life is an inclination whereby the creature seeks its chiefest good; as love in the other is that complacency whereby it rests in the enjoyment of that good. No other deserves in the least to be sought, except that alone in which we are to rest eternally as in the fountain of all good.

33. And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love *his* neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

How great is the goodness of God, to require nothing of us but our heart, devoted to him by love, and to give us even that which he requires! Who, after this, can desire to free himself from so amiable an obligation? Our sacrifice is within ourselves: that which God requires of us is not a victim of a different nature, but our own heart, which he would have us sacrifice to him by evangelical self-denial, mortification, and the fire of charity. No sacrifice can please God without this, and this alone can please him without any other.

34. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him *any question.*

To love and to assert the truth when an occasion offers, is oftentimes a considerable step toward salvation. It is a great matter for a man to know his duty, and to be convinced of the obligations under which he lies; but this does not immediately bring him to the kingdom of God. "God is love; and he who dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God dwelleth in him," and lives and reigns in him by his Spirit. A silence of assent and submission, is a silence useful to salvation; but a silence of weakness and obstinacy, is the condemnation of the enemies of the truth.

SECT. V.—CHRIST THE LORD OF DAVID.—PROUD TEACHERS.

35. ¶ And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? 36. For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

Faith alone, which knows what Christ is by his divine nature, and what he is become by his mercy, knows how to reconcile the seeming contradictions which are in this divine compound, God-man: son of David, by his birth according to the flesh; and Lord of David, by his eternal birth in God his Father, as also by the rights of his third birth, namely, his resurrection, which placed him at the right hand of his Father. Now is the time in which we must choose where we will be to all eternity; either under his feet as rebellious slaves, subdued by his power and subjected to his justice, or in his body as faithful members, sanctified by his Spirit, and obedient to their head. Let us make our choice—there is no time to be lost.

37. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he *then* his son? And the common people heard him gladly.

The relish of God's word is much greater in those who abound in simplicity and faith, than in those who have a large stock of wit and learning. It is necessary for us to love the truth if we would rejoice in seeing it triumph; but to love it as we ought, we must love nothing which it condemns, and every thing which it commands.

38. ¶ And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and *love* salutations in the marketplaces, 39. And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: 40. Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

Hypocritical teachers and directors of the conscience, are those of whom we ought to have the greatest distrust. We may discover them by the following marks: (1.) When we observe that they seek to distinguish themselves by external singularities. (2.) When they love every thing which may gain them esteem. (3.) When they desire to have the preference before others in matters of religion. (4.) When they

love to be distinguished in public assemblies. (5.) When they endeavour to draw all the wealth they can from the women under their care. (6.) When they affect to appear as men who have the gift of prayer. What a sad misfortune is it, that men should live like Pharisees under the gospel, and mix hypocrisy with a religion which ought to be nothing but spirit and truth! There is no person indeed in the world but either seeks a false glory, or is not altogether insensible thereto; because there is none who has not some degree of pride; but there are known hypocrites, and there is a pride full of artifice and design, which must not be gently treated. There is nothing so directly opposite to that chaste and sincere love which we owe to God, as this unjust desire of distinction and preference.

SECT. VI.—THE WIDOW WHO CAST INTO THE TREASURY OF HER WANT.

41. ¶ And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. 42. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

The notice which Christ takes of these offerings gives us to understand, that God judges even at present of all the alms which are given by men, but that he does not judge of them as men do. They are not the rich upon whom Christ fixes his eyes; but it was only for the sake of this poor widow that he came hither, and sat, and beheld the rich and their offerings. It is of little consequence to this poor woman, to be either neglected or despised by everybody, while the rich are respected, and their liberality admired; the approbation of Christ alone is of more advantage to her than every thing in the world, and supplies the want of every thing besides.

43. And he called *unto him* his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

It is of importance that prelates and ecclesiastical persons should know perfectly how to value good works, and to judge of them, not as the world, but as God judges. It is for this very purpose, that Christ expressly calls the apostles, and

makes them come to behold this sight. He who equally sees the hand and the heart, judges of the former only by the latter. It is matter of great consolation for the poor, to be able to give even more than the rich, and to surpass them in liberality.

44. For all *they* did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, *even* all her living.

One single farthing, given by a person in want, and with a free heart, is more, in the sight of God, than millions given by the rich, and with a heart not truly Christian. We give the more the less we reserve to ourselves in proportion to what we give. Never did any king come near the liberality of this poor widow, who reserves nothing for herself. This alms has enough in it to humble both the rich, who by reason of covetousness, give but little, and the poor, who through a distrust of Providence, give nothing at all.

CHAPTER XIII.

SECT. I.—THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.—FALSE PROPHETS.

1. And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*

The world admires a stately and magnificent temple; but the temple which attracts the eyes and the heart of Christ, as worthy of God and framed by his Spirit, is a heart which resembles that of this poor widow, a heart consecrated by charity, wherein God makes his abode, and in which this virtue worships him, sacrifices itself to him, mourns continually in his presence, and there feeds upon his divine word.

2. And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

Christ bears with the simplicity of his disciples, who would have him admire a temple of which he was himself the model, and which was only a figure of his body: but he makes use of this simplicity to instruct them, to take off their minds

from this visible temple, and to give them a foresight of that justice which he was to exercise upon this building, on the account of the Jews. Nothing of that which is to be destroyed is worthy to be the true temple of God. It is in a poor and humble heart that he delights to dwell. Happy that, in which God alone is adored and loved!

3. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4. Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?

Christ gives occasion to the apostles to pass from a vain and unprofitable curiosity to one which is holy and of great advantage. Let us study to imitate him on proper occasions. Those who are commissioned to proclaim to the world the judgments of God and the miseries to come, may seek after the knowledge and the signs of them with success, not in the stars, nor in vain predictions, but in the Scriptures.

5. And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any *man* deceive you: 6. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ;* and shall deceive many.

A great number of deceivers is one of the signs of the end of the world. It is a terrible judgment upon men, for them to believe that they are consulting a man of God who may instruct them, while they are consulting only a seducer who deceives them. Let us beg of God to preserve us from it. The expectation of new and extraordinary things is an occasion of which the devil generally makes an ill use in order to deceive men. An author of heresy or schism, an usurper of Christ's authority, a minister without mission,—these are all so many false Christs, whom we must carefully avoid as so many seducers.

SECT. II.—PERSECUTIONS.—THE ASSISTANCE OF THE HOLY GHOST.—PERSEVERANCE.

7. And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for *such things* must needs be; but the end *shall* not *be* yet.

That person well deserves to be envied, who, amid the most tempestuous troubles of this world, lives in a profound calm, as a citizen of another world raised above this. When

a man once thoroughly knows this present world, what its spirit is, and what the end of it is to be, he is prepared for all events, and is troubled at nothing. We do not sufficiently consider all the commotions of empires, and wars of nations, as being in the hand of God, and making part of his judgments. All these things must needs come to pass, but wo unto those by whom they come!

8. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these *are* the beginnings of sorrows.

All the afflictions and miseries of this life are but the beginning of hell to the wicked, but to the elect they are a purification. To the former they are the occasion of new sins; to the latter, they are, as it were, a glass, which represents to them their rebellion against God, the insurrection of their passions, their immoderate fears of the evils of this life, their vain hopes, and their hunger after its false enjoyments; and at the same time, a means of making some little amends for all these disorders by repentance and mortification.

9. ¶ But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.

Let us take heed to ourselves, not that we may avoid persecution and disgrace from men, for this is the lot of the true disciples and ministers of Christ; but that we may receive them like Christians, and in the spirit of our Master. The true way to secure ourselves from the terrors of God's judgments, is to be little concerned at the judgment and anger of men, and to bear testimony to Christ by our words and actions, without any dreadful apprehensions of what we may suffer on that account.

10. And the gospel must first be published among all nations.

The faith is universal as well as the church: they have an equal extent, and the one cannot be without the other: the faith being the foundation of the church, and the church being the house, the pillar, and support of the faith. That doctrine and that church which, from the beginning, and even at this present time were and are preached by the

apostles or their successors, are the only evangelical doctrine, and the only true church of Christ.

11. But when they shall lead *you*, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

It is God who speaks in the martyrs and confessors. A forecast which is too cautious, and proceeds from human weakness, often renders us unworthy of that which God would otherwise perform in us. How good is it to resign ourselves up entirely to his Spirit, avoiding equally presumption and negligence! The Holy Ghost does in us whatever he enables us to do; and is, at that time, the principle and author of our words, desires, and good works. So that every good action, every good inclination of the will, and every good use of the tongue, ought to be attributed to the Holy Spirit! Not that each of these is not also a free act of the will of man, but because it is grace alone which is the principal cause, which goes before, excites, heals, applies, and puts the will in motion.

12. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against *their* parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.

Faith gives us as many fathers, children, brethren, and sisters as there are Christians; infidelity changes even those whom nature has given us into enemies, betrayers, and executioners. But all this does not affect him to whom God is all things. The temptation the most dangerous, and most sensible to nature, is that which arises from our kindred and relations; but it is in this very thing that the triumph of grace appears more illustrious, in breaking the strongest and dearest ties, in order to unite us entirely to God alone.

13. And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Faith and charity join us in the closest union with strangers and the most barbarous people; infidelity and hatred break even the strictest ties of nature. Happy is that person who is hated for the sake either of the truth which he maintains,

or of the virtue which he practises, and does not grow at all weary of being so! His cause is the cause of God. And what greater honour and happiness can we possibly have, than to be joined in the same cause with our Judge, who is at the same time the Holy One and the Almighty! Lord, it is thy own cause; but who could ever support and maintain it, if thy grace did not support him, and that to the end!

SECT. III.—THE ABOMINATION IN THE HOLY PLACE.—FLIGHT.—EXTREME EVILS.

14. ¶ But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains:

We have reason to fear that the wrath of God is ready to fall upon a people, when we see the abomination of error, sacrilege, and impiety, and the profanation of holy things, reign among them. In times of the divine displeasure, the most secure and beneficial flight, is to fly from the corruption of the world, and to depart from its maxims and manners. In public calamities, the generality of people think how to save their goods and their lives; but few consider how they may save their souls; the reason is, because men reflect more upon the calamities themselves, than upon the sins which have drawn them down.

15. And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter *therein*, to take any thing out of his house: 16. And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.

There is no time, which is not a time of abomination and desolation; since sin, which is the greatest of all, never ceases to lay waste the world. Happy that person, who, during this life, is either on the housetop, by having embraced the state of evangelical perfection, or in the field, by a laborious and penitential life. It is a great folly in either of them, to go down, or to turn back, in order to take up that which they have quitted, and to enter again into the conversation of the world.

17. But wo to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

Unhappy that fruitfulness which produces nothing but miserable wretches! Happy those women who have chosen

the part to have nothing to do in the world, but only to secure the salvation of their souls, and, like wise virgins, to keep themselves always in a readiness to trim their lamps! It is a very great misfortune, at the hour of death, either to find the heart only big with good desires, or to see only some small beginnings of good works, as yet feeble and imperfect. To be able to abide the wrath of God, we must have [faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and] works, and those such as are animated and strengthened by charity.

18. And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.

How late is it, to begin our flight from the world and sin in the winter of old age and death! In the winter the days are short, the ways bad, the season rainy, the night comes on before we are aware, and we meet with a thousand impediments and hinderances of flight and travelling: these are a lively representation of those hinderances of salvation which men find at the end of their lives. The grace to prevent them by a speedy conversion is obtained only by prayer.

19. For *in* those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.

There is nothing so dreadful as that which passes, at the end of life, in a soul which has never thought of disengaging and weaning itself from the world. What affliction or misery can equal that of a Christian, who can then find nothing in his whole life, from the beginning to the end thereof, but what must render him unworthy of mercy! But the greatest of all miseries would be to despair of this mercy, and not to have recourse to it.

20. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

Time is designed only to be subservient to the eternity of the elect—every thing is for them. God measures the days of their life by the election which he has made of them for heaven; and he often shortens them, lest they should be corrupted by the wickedness of the world. If God did not put

a stop to the malicious designs of the devil against them, how could they possibly escape his fury? We shall never know, until we come to heaven, either the number or the nature of those temptations from which God has delivered us, both during our life, and at the approach of death.

SECT. IV.—FALSE CHRISTS.—THE ELECT ALMOST SEDUCED.—THE COMING OF CHRIST.

21. And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here *is* Christ; or, lo, *he is* there; believe *him* not:

How apprehensive ought we to be, lest we should take a false Christ for the true, error for truth, and a corrupt morality for the gospel of Jesus Christ! We must persevere to the very end in the way of the gospel, wherein God has been pleased to set us. It is a very great misfortune to wander at the end of our days, and to fall into the ways of delusion, under pretence of greater perfection, more elevated contemplation, or the like.

22. For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if *it were* possible, even the elect.

God himself directs his elect when they fall into the hands of a seducer, or else by his goodness soon removes them from him. The religion of Jesus Christ being confirmed by so many undoubted miracles, it is the greatest folly imaginable to hearken to those who would dissuade us from acknowledging him to be the true Christ, although they should show even signs and wonders. The unity of Christ is to Christians the same thing which the unity of God was to the Jews, who were expressly forbidden to hearken to any who should seek to turn them away from the worship of the true God, which had been established by so many miraculous works, even though they should perform such things as might otherwise justly make them pass for prophets. Deut. xiii.

23. But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.

The word of Christ ought to render us watchful, humble, and perseverant in prayer. It is a very great piece of infidelity, not to profit by the warnings and admonitions of

Christ, so as to take particular heed of the dangers which he points out to us, and to exercise a Christian vigilance in relation to ourselves and to our duties. He has foretold us all things, and it can be only our own fault and negligence if we are surprised by seducers, or drawn aside into errors. To be so, is the punishment either of curiosity, or of pride and presumption, or of forgetfulness as to religious duties, and especially prayer, or of neglect in the sacred study of the Scriptures.

24. ¶ But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,

There will be nothing but darkness for impenitent sinners at the time of death and judgment. That is the time of affliction for every one who has given up his heart to the world, or to error. His faith, which he abandoned during his life, frequently in its turn abandons him. He loses sight of Christ, the church disappears before his eyes, and he no longer receives any light, either from this sun or this moon of the new world.

25. And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.

There is nothing so dreadful to the wicked as the coming of Christ in his anger, at the hour of death. They see all things perishing as to themselves here below, and no hopes of succour from above. Those natural lights, with which they pleased themselves so much are now become nothing but darkness to them; and they see that the power and strength on which they relied, are no other than weakness itself.

26. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

There is nothing so worthy of Jesus Christ as that day of his power and glory: there is nothing so dreadful to a sinner who has laboured only to deserve his wrath. To such a person, the day of his death is this terrible day of the Lord. At that time the devil leaves him no more faith than just enough to foresee the rigour of the divine judgment, and all these preparations for the day of vengeance.

27. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

O desirable day for the elect! O happy reunion, so long expected, by which Christ will gather them together, and join them in the unity of his body, his Spirit, and his glory! The wicked shall see nothing of this but what shall grieve and afflict them, and cause them, at the sight of the happiness of the elect, to say within themselves, "We fools accounted their life madness, and their end to be without honour; how are they numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!"

28. Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: 29. So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, *even* at the doors.

What man is there who has any assurance that the time of his appearance before God, in order to be judged, is not as near at hand as that of summer is, when the fig tree putteth forth leaves? We often depend upon a long life; whereas life is but, as it were, a leaf ready to fall, and to become the sport of winds in a moment.

30. Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.

Since all things which are foretold must infallibly be accomplished, what blindness and folly is it, not to secure our salvation by a truly Christian life! Every thing which God declares to us, in relation to those great truths concerning the shortness of life, the uncertainty of the hour of death, the severity of his judgment, etc., is grounded upon the infallible truth of his word, confirmed by so many miracles; and yet the generality of Christians either believe it not, or live as if it were only a fable, or something which did not at all concern them!

31. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

How many are there who rely more upon the word of a man, who is nothing but falsehood, than upon that of truth itself, which is infallible! Is not that which we ourselves

have seen pass in the world, during the little time we have been in it, of itself alone a certain pledge of the truth of this declaration? The history of the world is only a history of what is past; a picture of the instability of human affairs, and a proof that every thing passes away; that every thing is really nothing, and that God alone is all. Be thou alone therefore, O my God, all things to me! and grant that I may adhere entirely to thee, who continuest always the same!

SECT. V.—THE DAY UNCERTAIN.—WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER.

32. ¶ But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

It imports but little to know that day: but it is of infinite importance to be always ready, that we may not be surprised by it. A man who is not surprised by the day, is surprised by the hour: so rare and uncommon a thing is it to be watchful to the end. Let us shut the eyes of our curiosity concerning that day; and let us open those of our vigilance upon every day, every hour, and every moment.

33. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.

The exercise of a Christian who expects the time of death, and who ought every day to expect it, is frequently to examine his heart, and to keep it clean; to oppose sloth, and continually to rouse up his faith, having the arms of prayer always ready. God has thought fit that the end of our life, and that of the world, should be always concealed from us, to induce us to look upon every day as the last.

34. *For the Son of man is* as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

The whole which our blessed Master, when he ascended into heaven, recommended to the care of his servants, consisted in fidelity and watchfulness; fidelity, in doing every thing well which is to be done in his house, in the heart, in the church, according to the full extent of their duty; watchfulness, in suffering no stranger nor enemy to enter by the

senses, which are the gates of the soul, in permitting nothing which belongs to the master to go without his orders, and in carefully observing all commerce and correspondence which the heart may have abroad in the world, to the prejudice of the master's service.

35. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

To watch, is to be like a servant, always employed within about his master's business, and like a porter, always careful in examining what comes in and goes out. The more the master is expected, the more diligent the servants are in working, watching, and keeping themselves in readiness. Can one who has received the sentence of his death, and has no right to live one moment, need any admonition to prepare himself to die? Does not a prisoner who expects his deliverance, keep himself always ready to leave his dungeon? And is not he who has no such expectation extremely miserable? The hour of death is so very uncertain, that Christ would have us look for it at all hours, and therefore mentions four several parts of one and the same night, at any of which it may possibly happen.

36. Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

Remissness and negligence, as well as the greater sins, are often the occasion of our being surprised by death. A porter asleep exposes the house to be robbed, and well deserves to be punished. A Christian, whose faith is not watchful, exposes his own heart to the enemy of his salvation, and to those who are continually watching, in order to steal away all the valuable things which God has laid up there, as in his own house.

37. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

No person can pretend any exemption from the fear of God's judgment, or from the duty of watchfulness in expectation of the last day. Christ here recommends it to all; and yet there is scarce a small number to be found, who, by Christian watchfulness, are always ready. Those who have greatest occasion to watch, are generally those who do it the

least. Few pastors, masters, superiors, and fathers, watch over their flock, their servants, their subjects, and their children. Abundance of people are very watchful throughout their whole life as to the affairs of others, but do not spend one moment in watching over their own heart, and in thinking seriously of the business of salvation. My God, how much is faith obscured and darkened, and what need have we that thou shouldest renew it in our hearts!

CHAPTER XIV.

SECT. I.—THE CONSPIRACY OF THE JEWS.—PRECIOUS OINTMENT POURED ON CHRIST'S HEAD.

1. After two days was *the feast of* the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put *him* to death.

When once a priest has lost the spirit of religion, and a doctor or teacher the love of truth, they think of nothing but how to sacrifice both to their self-love. This passion is too cunning to neglect to cover its injustice, and to varnish over those crimes which might defame it in the world. But of what use is it to conceal the filthiness of sin from the eyes of men, but only to double the guilt in the sight of God, and to cast greater obstacles in the way to repentance?

2. But they said, Not on the feast *day*, lest there be an uproar of the people.

These men were not at all afraid of committing this crime on the feast day, but they were afraid they should not have an opportunity of doing it on that day; so fully had the desire of completing this wickedness possessed them. The offer of Judas caused them to lay aside their apprehensions, and to change their mind; or rather God, who conducts his designs as he pleases, and intended at that time to substitute the true Paschal Victim in the room of the figurative passover, hereby made it evident, that sinners do nothing in all their wickedness but that only which he permits them to do.

3. ¶ And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat *at meat*, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured *it* on his head.

Happy that person who knows how to make that subservient to charity which others dedicate to the service of concupiscence! Every thing which is given to God is acceptable to him, when it is charity which gives it. Zeal and love for Jesus Christ have commendable excesses. Great expense in external magnificence designed to honour him, would most commonly be better employed in feeding his members; but there are some extraordinary occasions on which a sort of profuseness cannot be blamed. It belongs to him who gives this love, to inform us when and how far we are permitted to gratify it.

4. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

The fervent zeal of devout persons is generally censured by the world as indiscretion; but the judgment of the world is not the rule of their actions. When a man has any thing to spend or waste, he cannot sacrifice it so well as to the honour of Christ; and it is much better to waste and destroy all these things, which may be instrumental to luxury or any other vice, and become snares to others, be their value ever so great, such as excellent but obscene pictures, etc., than to leave them to the use of the world.

5. For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

To regulate the duties of religion and those of charity, as to outward appearance, requires abundance of prudence. The traitor who raised this murmur in the apostolical college, made use of their zeal to cover his own avarice: so dangerous is it to have any corrupt leaven in an ecclesiastical society. They are generally temporal interests which carnal men do there take most to heart, and which exasperate them against those who have little value for such things. These ought really to be very little esteemed among those who have quitted all for the sake of God, or ought at least to be ready to do it.

6. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.

It belongs to God to speak in behalf of his servants, and to them silently to bear the censures of the world. The world is a very bad judge in matters relating to God, because it generally judges concerning them with passion, and without knowledge. Those who do not follow its maxims it condemns without mercy, not being able to endure that they should apply their substance to a religious and penitential use, much less that they should serve Christ at the expense of all.

7. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

During Christ's residence upon earth, it was necessary visibly to honour him in his own person; and since he is no longer visible himself, it is necessary to do it in that of the poor. There are two ways of honouring him,—by internal and external duties. As to the first, it is sufficient that he be present by faith, or by an invisible presence in the eucharist. As to the second, it is necessary he should be visible, and he is so in the poor, whom he has substituted in his stead, and who demand and receive, in his name, whatever he requires in this kind of duties.

8. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.

Christ would not lose any part of the honour due to his mysteries; he hastens the accomplishment of them by anticipation, that he may shed forth the spirit and grace of them in favour of those who love him. It was lawful to pay even external honours to the mysteries of Christ, before they were accomplished: how much more then, may, and ought we to do it, since they are?

9. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, *this* also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

That which to the eyes of the flesh seems no better than folly, is proposed by Christ to the eyes of faith, as an action of true wisdom. The saints honour Jesus Christ, and he honours the saints, in causing them to be honoured. Nothing is

more conformable to his spirit, than to celebrate their memory and publish their praise. Far is he from being at all jealous at our doing this, since we do it by his appointment, with regard to him, and upon his account, and are as far from adoring them with that divine worship which we pay to him, as the creature is distant from the Creator.

SECT. II.—THE BARGAIN AND TREACHERY OF JUDAS.—THE PASCHAL SUPPER.

10. ¶ And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them.

See here a surprising spectacle! On one side, a woman, formerly in the power of the devil, gives herself up entirely to Christ, and pours out her heart and her good things upon him. On the other, an apostle of Jesus Christ gives himself up to the devil, betrays his master into the hands of his ministers, and thinks of nothing but shedding his blood. Who can forbear trembling, when he reflects upon this league and conspiracy between a prince of the Christian church and the prince of the Jewish, to destroy the church itself in its Founder and Head? Christ sees and permits it, to teach the faithful not to be greatly troubled at the desertion and treachery even of pastors, when it happens in the church

11. And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.

The joy of the wicked is to have success in their crimes. But what joy is this? It is the joy only of a moment, which will be changed into everlasting sorrow. It was easy for our blessed Saviour to have broken this sacrilegious, and, as it may be called, simoniacal bargain, by diverting this opportunity, which depended on himself; but it was necessary that sin should be instrumental in the destruction of sin, and that the Author of life should die to destroy death and his empire.

12. ¶ And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? 13. And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.

It belongs to the apostles and the proper pastors, accord-

ing to Christ's appointment, to prepare the true passover of the paschal sacrifice and communion, and likewise the hearts of the faithful for it, in purifying them from the leaven of sin by the exercises of repentance. This pitcher of water is an emblem of baptism and repentance. None but those who have been cleansed by this water can eat the Christian passover; neither can this passover be either celebrated or eaten, but only in the bosom of the church.

14. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? 15. And he will shew you a large upper room furnished *and* prepared: there make ready for us.

Christ alone knows in what heart he is to keep a true passover, "not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." We ought not to make ourselves ready any otherwise than according to his will; we cannot do it but by his grace, which alone can make our heart become a new lump, purged from all leaven.

16. And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.

The knowledge, power, and wisdom of Jesus appear in all his works. He makes them at this time more particularly known to the apostles, on purpose to strengthen their faith and confidence, to prepare them for temptation, and to induce them the more easily to believe the mystery he was going to celebrate in their presence.

17. And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. 18. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.

Christ expiates the vain joy and foolish mirth of worldly feasts by the sadness of this repast, wherein he thinks of nothing but the cross which was preparing for him. God is dishonoured by those immoderate overflowings of heart in which the sweetness of human friendships does consist, and to which we are most apt to give way at the table of our friends. Christ makes amends for this dishonour by that reserve of heart which the treachery of Judas causes, and by the mortifying consideration of that little fidelity which he foresees in his disciples and friends.

19. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, *Is* it I? and another *said, Is* it I?

There is no sin whatever of which a man ought not to think himself capable, since he has the seed of all in his corrupt will. It is just that the disciples should partake in that affliction of heart which their Master underwent; and there is scarcely a greater in friendship, than for a man to be suspected of infidelity and treachery by his friend. Alas! how few are there, even of those who eat at Christ's table, who are not guilty at least of the smaller instances of treachery and infidelity toward him, and those almost without number!

20. And he answered and said unto them, *It is* one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.

God does not cease to admonish the sinner, though he sees him determined, by his wickedness, to commit the sin. The reason is, because he has more than one design in his conduct; and because the righteous, through his grace, profit by those admonitions which the wicked render ineffectual by the corruption of their heart. It is good, sometimes, to make even the most virtuous persons apprehensive that they have something which lurks in their heart of which they are not sensible, to the end they may examine themselves thoroughly, and be more distrustful of that corrupt principle which makes them capable of all evil.

21. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed? good were it for that man if he had never been born.

God does whatever he pleases, both with and by the wicked. Let us beseech him to do his holy will both in and by us, in our heart, and for our salvation. Wretched is that man who serves the designs of God only by his sins. It were much better for a man absolutely not to be, than to employ his being only in the service of sin; but God, in his wisdom, judges it better to permit sin, that his glory may appear the more illustrious in the good which he knows how to bring out of it by his power. We rejoice at the birth of a child; but how often ought we to shed a flood of tears, were we but able to look into the future! How lovely and adorable is this

goodness of Christ, who solicits this traitor afresh to enter again into himself, by the consideration both of the dreadful punishment attending his crime, and of the prophecies wherein he had been instructed, together with the rest of the apostles! But what strange obduracy, what malice is there in this wretch, which renders so much gentleness and goodness ineffectual!

SECT. III.—THE EUCHARIST.

22. ¶ And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake *it*, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

Jesus Christ bestows his gifts in a manner very remote from the haughtiness of the great. These make their presents with pomp and ostentation; because, in reality, they are nothing, and because there is no way of setting them off but by words and external ceremonies. He bestows his greatest gifts with the greatest simplicity in the world, because they are beyond all expression, and because he knows well how to make men sensible of their worth and efficacy by faith, and by the effects which they produce in the heart.

23. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and they all drank of it. 24. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

The blood of Jesus Christ becomes, through his goodness, milk for his children, a band of union to his members, the seal of his covenant, and the ransom of his slaves; and, on the contrary, through the wickedness of the imitators of Judas, it becomes to them a mortal poison, a sword of separation, the seal of their reprobation, and the cause of an eternal captivity. "They all drank of it;" for Christ does not withdraw his presence from the eucharist on the account of the greatest sinners, not even of Judas. Miserable wretch! in whom the very height of ingratitude is formed by the sacrifice and sacrament of thanksgiving, and by the greatest of all benefits! This is the last for Judas, and very often for many others.

25. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Let us take care to raise our hearts from the sacramental

communion here on earth to the eternal communion in heaven, to be celebrated there, not under veils or sensible symbols, but openly and without veils. The sight of truth, unveiled and perfectly disclosed to our eyes, is a torrent of delight and joy, which, as it were, inebriates the soul, makes it forget all the afflictions and miseries of the earth, and transports it out of itself, in order to its living only in the truth, upon the truth, and for the truth. O eternal truth! may the hopes of being satisfied with thee in heaven engage thy disciples to taste thee on earth, to feed upon thee, to adhere constantly to thee, to love and desire nothing but thee, and to sacrifice themselves for thy sake!

26. ¶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

Praise and thanksgiving, both on earth and in heaven, precede, accompany, and follow the communion of the Christian church. Can he who relishes Christ, who comprehends that which he receives and eats, and which nourishes him in the holy sacrament, forbear breaking forth into praises and thanksgivings? Praise never ceases in heaven; but on earth it is interrupted by prayer. The reason is, because the benefits which God confers upon us are soon succeeded by new wants and necessities. Let us then, with Christ and his apostles, frequently pass from the praises of their assembly in the upper room to the prayers in the garden.

SECT. IV.—PETER'S DENIAL FORETOLD.

27. And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

The apostles, going from the very communion, meet with an occasion of sin, and fall thereby! Who can forbear trembling? The sufferings and cross of Christ scatter and disperse the sheep for some time; but it is only in order to reunite them afterward, and with and by them to unite all nations in one fold, and under one shepherd. Thus persecutions seem to lay the church waste, and they establish it; to intimidate the pastors, and they encourage them; to suppress

the truth, and they confirm it, propagate it, and give it a new lustre.

28. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.

It is a very great consolation to the diseased and infirm members, to be assured that their Head will not abandon them when they fall, but that he will even go before them. If Jesus did not vouchsafe to come to meet us, in the power of his new-raised life, that is, by powerful graces, how should we be able ever to rise and go to him?

29. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet *will* not I.

To presume upon our own strength, to prefer ourselves before others, and not to hearken to admonitions, are three branches of pride, and three occasions of very grievous falls. Peter thought himself in some measure free from sin, and infallible; since he was confident he should not fall, notwithstanding the assurance which Christ gave him of the contrary: and it was this foolish imagination which caused him to fall more grossly and shamefully. How little does man know himself, if he believes he can have any dependence upon his own heart! Christ is our strength, when we rely upon him; but he is only an occasion of our falling, when we do not put our whole confidence in his strength.

30. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, *even* in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Christ knows even the least motion of our heart: let us, therefore, beseech him to impart some of his knowledge to us, that we may know it ourselves, and to our own advantage. The day, the hour, the moment of Peter's fall, are expressly declared to him; but pride has drawn a veil over his heart, and his fall is necessary, to convince him that he is capable of falling.

31. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.

Pride is obstinate in the presumption which it has of its own strength. This is a very contagious distemper. One of the chief of the pastors was more sick of it than the rest, and

even infected the others therewith. God permitted this, to the end that his example, being the more remarkable, might make the deeper impression, and raise a greater apprehension of falling into it. God punishes those more severely who are the first in giving a bad example, and become thereby the source of sin in a community. They all said the same thing with Peter, and yet he alone, left to himself, denies his Master.

SECT. V.—THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN.—WATCH AND PRAY.

32. And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.

An afflicted heart ought to shut itself up from men by retirement, and to open itself to God by prayer. Christ, as the good Shepherd, does that first himself which he enjoins his sheep to do—preparing for temptations by prayer. He prays retired, not out of any necessity, but both out of obedience to his Father, who had prescribed this to him as well as all the rest, and out of love toward us, whom he would instruct, edify, and redeem by this means.

33. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;

The sight of God's justice casts even his Son into fear and amazement, and our sins raise in him a mortal grief; and shall we alone remain insensible of both? We could not enjoy one moment of satisfaction, should God be pleased to open our eyes that we might see, as our blessed Saviour did, our own sins and his justice in all their dreadful and amazing circumstances. Christ has borne them both for us, and even spared us the mortification of so grievous and dismal a sight.

34. And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.

It is the duty of a Christian soul to tarry and continue with Christ under his sufferings, and to contemplate his pains and sorrows. We could never have known how exceeding painful the inward sufferings of Christ were, had he not discovered them himself. Let us have, at least, a grateful sense both of his condescension in vouchsafing to lay open his heart

to us while it was under this mortal sorrow, and of his love in choosing to open and expose it thereto for our sakes. How good is it to open our heart to him when it is oppressed with grief, in order to attract that grace which he has merited for us by this sorrow unto death!

35. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

Observe here the extreme humiliation of Christ in prayer. Pastors have sometimes such heavy crosses to bear that they beseech God, but with the greatest submission, that they may be delivered from them. It is expedient to make such addresses in private, that they may not discourage those whom they ought to encourage to suffer all things for God and his church.

36. And he said, Abba, Father, all things *are* possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt.

What averseness soever the flesh has to suffering and death, the spirit ought to accept both the one and the other. The will of God ought always to be dearer to us than our own, whatever it may cost us to perform it. God can employ his almighty power in delivering us from our afflictions; but it often tends more to his glory and our advantage to employ it in supporting us under them. When we see the only Son of God not delivered from this cup, even after so much importunity, who can complain when he himself is not?

37. And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?

Peter ought to be thoroughly sensible that he has promised too much upon his own strength, since he finds himself overcome even by sleep. It is upon this account that Christ speaks particularly to him. God permits the lesser faults, on purpose to cure men of presumption; but when they take no warning thereby, he suffers them to have grievous falls. Peter is not sensible of this: the reason is, because a man never sees any thing when he is full of himself, and presumes upon his own strength. He falls, both for himself and for us: let us profit by his fall, as he did.

38. Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly *is* ready, but the flesh *is* weak.

If we must watch and pray, to prevent and withstand temptation, let us not be surprised that so many enter into it, and fall thereby: it is for no other reason but because there are very few who watch and pray in that manner and with that constancy which they ought. Prayer is necessary in order to watch, and watchfulness in order to pray; and both the one and the other are so to secure us from temptation. Peter was deficient in vigilance, because he was so in prayer; and through the neglect of both he fell, being overcome by the fear of death and the love of life.

39. And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words.

The simplicity and plainness of Christ in his prayers is an important lesson, and of great use and advantage. A Christian who prays to God is not an orator, who would persuade by his eloquence, but a beggar, who would move to compassion by his poverty and humility. These speak plainly and without ornament; and Jesus speaks thus to God, because he has clothed himself with our humility and poverty.

40. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him.

The good Shepherd cannot forget his sheep, knowing their weakness. He ceases not to watch over them and for them, though they cannot watch one hour with him. There was nothing for these disciples to answer, but there was enough for their spiritual improvement, and particularly for that of Peter, who ought to have profited by this second admonition, in acknowledging his own weakness, in humbling himself, and begging that strength which he had not.

41. And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take *your* rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Jesus Christ, who is holiness itself, is just going to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, on purpose to recover sinners out of the hands of the devil. The hour is come, so much dreaded by the flesh, but earnestly desired by the spirit, for the glory of God. We ought with calmness and tranquillity

to expect those grievous events with which we are threatened: they cannot happen but by the appointment of God, and at the hour prefixed by him.

42. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.

Jesus always suffered beforehand the pains and torments which were designed to be inflicted on him, because he always foresaw them. It is but a moment since Christ, clothed with our weakness, was, as it were, oppressed, overwhelmed, and sunk beneath it; but now, being filled with his own strength, he goes to meet death, and supports and animates his disciples. A man left to his own strength at one time, and fortified by the grace of Christ at another, is no longer the same person: he could then do nothing; he can now do all things.

SECT. VI.—THE KISS OF JUDAS.—CHRIST APPREHENDED.—THE FLIGHT OF THE DISCIPLES.

43. ¶ And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

An apostle at the head of the enemies of Christ, what a mission is this! not to preach salvation, but to destroy the Saviour. We see here but too lively a picture of apostates, who have no sooner deserted from the church but they persecute it, put themselves at the head of conspiracies against the higher powers, and breathe nothing but violence, rebellion, and treason.

44. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead *him* away safely.

The mystical body of Christ, as well as its head, has its Judases. It is but too often betrayed with a kiss of peace, by false appearances of virtue, by calumnies spread abroad in soft language, and by deceitful pretences of peace and of the interest of the church; but it has also some faithful members, who imitate the meekness, quietness, and peaceable disposition of their Head.

45. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, Master; and kissed him.

There is greater patience exercised in suffering the false ca-

resses of a traitor, who owes his all to us, than in bearing the ill-treatment of a professed enemy. It happens but seldom that we have occasion to endure the greater instances of treachery; but throughout the whole course of our life we meet with continual occasions of enduring little artifices, dissimulations, deceits under colour of friendship, and infidelities under the veil of intimacy and confidence: it is hereby that we are to honour Christ, and that we have an opportunity of imitating his goodness, in suffering without anger and complaint, and adoring Jesus Christ betrayed by a kiss of peace.

46. ¶ And they laid their hands on him, and took him.

Jesus, seized as a slave, in order to deliver us from bondage, and to obtain for us the glorious liberty of the sons of God, well deserves to receive our homage in that condition. We honour this confinement or captivity of Christ not only when we endure the like ourselves, justly or unjustly, with meekness and patience, looking at Jesus under these circumstances; but also when we love to visit prisoners in order to relieve and assist them, and to encourage them to bear like Christians the loss of their liberty, in honour and imitation of Christ a prisoner, and by the spirit of repentance and mortification. The more difficult it is to bear this state as one ought, the more ought we to apply ourselves to those who are under it, and give them our assistance, to the end that their affliction may not be that of a reprobate, but of a Christian.

47. And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

The resistance of nature does not last long. A Christian is not a soldier of the world, to defend himself after a worldly manner, but a soldier of Christ, who is to defend himself like his Master, only by suffering with patience, and rendering good for evil. Christ permits Peter to transgress this rule, that he may have an opportunity of giving a more eminent example of it himself, by healing this person.

48. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and *with* staves to take me?

Jesus was pleased not only to suffer the punishment of a

thief, but also to bear the shame and ignominy due to such a person. To be thus calm and unmoved in the midst of so many provocations, is not the effect of any human courage, or of a common grace, but only of the grace of the God-man, whom the Word, in which he subsists, always conducts by his light, and always animates with his power.

49. I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the Scriptures must be fulfilled.

It was only out of obedience that Christ avoided confinement during his life, as he suffered it out of obedience at the appointed time. When a man suffers it with him, for having been faithful to God, and without having drawn it unseasonably upon himself, he is then the prisoner of God and of Jesus Christ. He who suffers according to God's appointment has this consolation, that he can justly say, I fulfil the Scriptures, the designs of God, and the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh, "for his body's sake, which is the church."

50. And they all forsook him, and fled.

Let us not at all wonder to see Jesus Christ forsaken by men, since he came to bear the punishment of men who had forsaken God, and to merit for them the blessing not to be forsaken by him. Nothing is the cause of greater mortification to Christ, than to be betrayed and sold by one friend, to be denied by another, and to be forsaken by all the rest, being so worthy as he was to be constantly loved. Hereby he teaches us what stress is to be laid upon the friendship of men who are not entirely devoted to God, and with what patience we ought to bear such acts of treachery from them.

51. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about *his* naked *body;* and the young man laid hold on him: 52. And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.

This incident, which seems to be of no consequence, serves to discover the power of Christ, and his great care and concern for his apostles: (1.) He thereby admonishes Peter that he ought to fly from the occasion, and not expose himself to temptation; these people having a design to seize all the disciples of our Lord. (2.) He by this discovers the same danger to the rest, and advises them likewise to flee. (3.) He

shows them that it was by his power that they escaped the danger. (4.) That even that person, who by their means is exposed thereto, escapes from it by the appointment of providence, and because he himself would suffer alone.

SECT. VII.—JESUS LED TO CAIAPHAS, CONDEMNED, AND ABUSED.

53. ¶ And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.

Jesus appears as a criminal before the ecclesiastical tribunal. How different are things to the eyes of faith from what they appear to the eyes of the world! There can be nothing more august than this assembly, if we judge of it by the state and profession of those who compose it: here holiness, authority, and learning seem to be united and consulting together; and yet, in reality, it is no better than a sacrilegious meeting, and a cabal of murderers. The criminals usurp the place of the Judge, and the Judge is arraigned and condemned as a criminal.

54. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.

A man never exposes himself to temptation without danger. Human engagements are attended with great difficulties, and the indiscreet advance of one false step has very often dreadful consequences. Peter has rashly boasted of his courage, his honour is at stake, he will by no means go back, and nothing is wanting on his part to his destruction. But it is much better for a man to retreat and humble himself for his fault, than thus blindly to pursue it to the last.

55. And the chief priest and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.

It is a double blindness to reject so many true witnesses of the innocence of Christ, and to seek for false ones against him. What can be expected of a judge who becomes a party, and is so much blinded by passion that he cannot conceal it? Let us learn of Christ to bear the injustice done us in suits at law with meekness and silence, in case there be no remedy, and the public interest do not oblige us to speak.

56. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together.

What innocence can ever complain of the like injustice, after having seen that of our blessed Saviour exposed to this? Such is this divine innocency, that falsehood itself cannot invent any thing which is capable of tarnishing it. It is no ordinary moderation to neglect the advantage which may be taken of a testimony plainly found to be false, and to forbear covering the false witness with shame and confusion. Christ follows none of these natural resentments, on purpose to moderate them in us, and to teach us to suppress them after his example, when the public good or the glory of God requires it.

57. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, 58. We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. 59. But neither so did their witness agree together.

The greatest truths misunderstood pass frequently for blasphemies, and are the occasion of great disturbances and transports of passion. There is no kind of persecution whatever which Christ has not suffered, sanctified, and consecrated in his own person. An orthodox teacher ought to comfort himself with his example, when, in order to persecute him, men falsify his opinions, writings, and doctrine, and by the help of calumny attribute a bad one to him.

60. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what *is it which* these witness against thee?

Jesus astonishes and confounds his judge by his silence and patience; but there is a very great difference between confounding and converting. It is no small humiliation and mortification to see ourselves deserted by those who are most obliged to defend us: how much greater is it then to see them at the head of our enemies! This is what Jesus Christ teaches us to bear without bitterness, animosity, or the least desire of revenge.

61. But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

The love of life renders the generality of men eloquent be-

fore their judges; the desire which Christ has to sacrifice his, causes him, like a victim, not so much as to open his mouth. He justifies us before his Father, in suffering himself to be condemned before men; he repairs our innocence in not defending his own; and pleads our cause so much the better before the supreme and eternal tribunal in heaven, as he seems to betray his own by his silence before this unjust tribunal. Happy that person who follows him at a distance at least, and in the disposition of his heart! How many are there who, like this high priest, interrogate the eternal truth without knowing it, or with a design to dishonour and persecute it! When we consult it with a double heart, it either answers not at all, or else in such a manner as to blind and harden us the more. Let us examine our own hearts before we undertake to inquire into the truth, that we may know whether they are in a condition to hearken to it, and to profit by its answers.

62. And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Jesus shows by this modest and courageous answer that his silence is not a silence proceeding from fear or want of power. He admonishes his judge by intimating to him that he is to be his. This is a kind of protestation against the violence and injustice which his sovereign dignity suffers; and an appeal against the abuse of this inferior court to the last tribunal. It belongs to none but God to appeal to himself, and to join the authority of a supreme judge with the humility of a criminal.

63. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?

That very thing which ought to enlighten this judge finishes and completes his blindness, through the bad disposition of his heart: so true is it that another voice and other ears besides those of the body are requisite, in order to our hearing with profit the truths of salvation. The great are generally offended and scandalized at great truths, instead of profiting by them; the reason is, because they have great passions. The truth of the last judgment, which ought to make the deep-

est impression upon the mind of a bishop, a judge, or a prince, is that which they are least willing to hear when they are not really the servants of God.

64. Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.

Let us adore Jesus Christ, condemned by his own people, in order to save that very people. He is judged by them all in general as unworthy to live; but they are the iniquities of us all which condemn him by their mouth. After this, who can wonder to see good men condemned by the world? Yes, Lord, thou art indeed guilty of death for our sins, because thy love caused thee to take them upon thyself, and thou wast pleased to become the victim for them. How then can I possibly avoid death, I who have deserved it by my own sins?

65. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.

The image of the invisible God refuses not, for our sakes, to be dishonoured by the most unworthy treatment. All his senses suffer: (1.) His sight, by their covering his face. (2.) His hearing, by their blasphemies. (3.) His smelling, by the nastiness of their spittle. (4.) His feeling, by their buffeting him, and the blows given by these servants. (5.) His taste, by the blood which proceeded from these blows, etc. This is a dreadful motive of humiliation for the sinner, who seeks only to gratify his senses; and it is more so for the proud and revengeful person, who cannot bear the least injury, and is a mere idolater of his false honour.

SECT. VIII.—PETER'S DENIAL AND REPENTANCE.

66. ¶ And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest:

Presumption, curiosity, and unprofitable conversation draw Peter into the occasion of his fall. When a man can be serviceable to his friends under their disgraces and persecutions for religion, he may then expose himself to some danger upon their account; but to do it when he cannot serve them in the least is to forget that he is weak, and that he ought, out of

humility, to avoid danger as much as possible, and not to expose himself thereto out of curiosity or presumption.

67. And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. 68. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.

What! not know him, who, by the eucharist, had just given himself to him, and was at that very time sacrificing himself for him? There are but too many who imitate Peter, in denying Christ by their works as soon as ever they leave the holy table, and in being ashamed before men of his truths, his gospel, and his friends. Men look upon it as a small thing, under the fair and specious pretexts of wisdom, advantage, and other prudential considerations, to dissemble the knowledge which they have of the innocency of those who are rendered odious to the world, or their agreement with them in the same sentiments and opinions. We shall one day see what judgment God will pass upon this conduct. The silence of a good man and a friend is a piece of treachery, which is sometimes more prejudicial and of more pernicious consequence than the accusation of a declared enemy.

69. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is *one* of them. 70. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art *one* of them: for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth *thereto*.

The experience of a first, and even of a second fall, is not sufficient to convince a presumptuous person, or to make him sensible of his danger. The danger is never small when the weakness is great, and a man depends upon himself. A silly woman, a word, or even a look, is able to overturn the chief pillars of the church, if they are not well founded upon the love of God and the contempt of the world, and of all its false advantages.

71. But he began to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not this man of whom ye speak.

Is this the man who said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." What knowledge, what faith, what zeal soever a man has, he

may lose it all in a moment, and become like Peter. Presumption was the cause of his fall: let humility support us, and conserve in us the gifts of God.

72. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

In vain does the cock crow to the ears of Peter; in vain do all preachers cry aloud to awaken the sinner, unless the grace of Christ open his understanding, his memory, and his heart, and draw from thence the tears of repentance. Peter's tongue utters not a word, but his heart speaks by his eyes. A true penitent ought to begin by silence, especially if his tongue has been the instrument of his sin. Such a person should speak to God by his love, and to men by his tears. It is to his heart that God speaks, when it is touched with a sense of his sins; and it is his heart which must speak to God, if it desires to be cured.

CHAPTER XV.

SECT. I.—JESUS BROUGHT BEFORE PILATE.—BARABBAS.—THE CLAMOUR OF THE JEWS AGAINST CHRIST.

1. And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried *him* away, and delivered *him* to Pilate.

Nothing can appear more regular in itself than this assembly; but the more lawful its authority is, the more criminal is the abuse thereof to the oppression of innocence. When the supreme judges betray their trust, they are more guilty than the inferior, because there is no remedy or appeal for those whom they oppress. Jesus is delivered to the secular power and to the Gentiles as a profane and impious person, because he is a universal criminal, who bears the sins both of Jews and Gentiles, of all states and conditions of men, and because he is to be condemned in the place of all, and to die for all. He refuses no judge, and declines no tribunal, be-

cause he looks upon himself as already condemned by his Father, and upon men as being, by their injustice, only the executioners of his sovereign justice.

2. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered and said unto him, Thou sayest *it*.

Christ bears testimony to his own royal dignity, but without saying any thing which might deliver him from the hands of his enemies. It is very difficult for a man not to own and declare that he is a king, when such an acknowledgment and declaration draw after them honour, respect, and every thing due to royalty. But when royalty itself is become a crime, then he who dares own and acknowledge it must despise life. Christ never confessed himself a king till he found himself in the hands of his enemies, because it was by the cross that he was to reign.

3. And the chief priests accused him of many things; but he answered nothing.

Having seen Jesus betrayed and delivered up by one of his apostles, we cannot wonder at all to see him accused by the chief priests. This consummate corruption in the chief ministers of religion makes it evident that it was high time that the Saviour should appear in the world, that the true priest should come to offer his sacrifice, and that grace should be shed abroad in the heart, as the sovereign remedy of sin.

4. And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee.

Our sins shut the mouth of Christ. He answered nothing, because he was to answer for us who had nothing to answer for ourselves. The silence of the person accused confounds both the malice of the accusers and the cowardice of the prevaricating judge, when this silence is supported by innocence.

5. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.

The silence of Jesus proceeds from his owning all our crimes before his Father, his only lawful judge. Concern, passion, fear of death, love of reputation, and desire to be justified, make an accused person speak who has nothing at liberty but his tongue; but even the tongue itself of Christ

is not at liberty, being under a kind of confinement from his meekness, his patience, his wisdom, his humility, his obedience, and his quality of victim, which make him even in love with shame and with the cross.

6. Now at *that* feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired.

This custom is a type of the deliverance of all mankind at the feast of the immolation of Christ the true paschal victim. It is a new benefit, that he would not be released at the feast of the passover; as it was one before, that he was willing to be redeemed at his presentation in the temple. There could have been no salvation for us, if the Saviour himself had not vouchsafed to be the sacrifice for it.

7. And there was *one* named Barabbas, *which lay* bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire *him to do* as he had ever done unto them.

Who could have believed any other, but that these people, who had so often seen the miracles of the Son of God, and had been loaded with his benefits, were going to speak in his favour, and to plead his innocence in order to procure his release? But nothing can be favourable to him, whom his Father has condemned for our sins.

9. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? 10. For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.

How much mischief does envy cause, when ecclesiastical persons suffer themselves to be possessed therewith! That which it first began to do against the Prince of pastors, the same will it continue to do against his ministers throughout all succeeding ages, and will never cease to pursue them till the end of the world. It was the cause of the death of Christ even from the beginning of the world, since it was by the envy of the devil that sin first entered into it, and since envy was that which made him "a murderer from the beginning." Wretched and miserable are his children, who accomplish the desires of their father. Miserable are those Cains who envy their brethren, and thereby become their murderers, at least in the desire of their hearts.

11. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.

The people follow the bad example and the sentiments of wicked priests, rather than those of the good. The envy of the priests, the credulity of the people, and the policy of the timorous and selfish magistrate, conspire to set Jesus Christ below Barabbas.

12. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do *unto him* whom ye call the King of the Jews?

What! to have Jesus Christ in his hands, and not know what to do with him! How many Christians are in the like condition! What shall we not do with him, provided we have faith! To what purpose is he not useful, who is the Saviour, the Sacrifice, the Priest, and the Mediator of men! What duties have we not to pay him! What requests have we not to make to him! What ought we not to present and offer to him! There are abundance of worldly people who know not what to do with Christ, that is, with their faith in Christ: it incommodes and perplexes them; they are unwilling to deliver it up openly; and they are likewise unwilling to follow it. When a person in authority, who is devoted to the service of God, has Jesus Christ and the interests of his kingdom within his power, he is far from saying, What shall I do with this king? For he knows very well that he ought to use his utmost endeavours to advance his kingdom in the world, and to make his own authority subservient to that end.

13. And they cried out again, Crucify him. 14. Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.

Faithless and ungrateful people! who make no other return but the punishment of the cross for all the favours and benefits they had received. How many more have Christians received, who yet cease not to crucify him afresh by their sins! Let us not pretend to say that we would never have preferred Barabbas before the Son of God: for we do the same thing whenever we prefer our will to his, our own satisfaction before his law, the world to his truth, and our own interests before the duties of religion.

15. ¶ And *so* Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged *him*, to be crucified.

Observe here the several crimes of Pilate:—(1.) Ambition renders him a coward. (2.) He releases a murderer. (3.) He prefers him before the Author of life. (4.) He abandons an innocent person. (5.) He causes him to be scourged. (6.) He unjustly delivers him up to his enemies. And, (7.) He causes him to be crucified. How many sins do too great a regard to men, and the fear of the world, cause a judge to commit who is not firmly settled in the love of justice! In order to his being the instrument of abundance of mischief it is not necessary that he should be altogether corrupt; it is sufficient if he be desirous only of pleasing some particular person. One single passion makes a man a slave, and prevails alone above a great number of good qualities. Complaisance is one of the most dangerous, because it seems to be a passion attending a good man, and because it has nothing in it which is shocking, nothing but what is gentle and good-natured, insomuch that it often passes even for gratitude, duty, and prudence.

SECT. II.—CHRIST SCOURGED, CROWNED WITH THORNS, AND INSULTED.

16. And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Pretorium; and they called together the whole band.

Let us adore the Son of God abandoned to the insolence of the soldiers. He is sometimes worse treated in a company of gentlemen, among the great pretenders to reason, than amid this whole band of cruel soldiers. He suffers at the hands of these that ill treatment to which his Father condemned him; and he suffers it in the body, wherein he was to suffer it: but the others, as far as lies in their power, debase and humble him in his glorious and immortal state by their infidelity with respect to his mysteries, and contrary to the design of God, who would have him honoured by the faith of his church.

17. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his *head*,

Let us honour Jesus Christ, dishonoured in that very quality which ought to have been most respected and honoured in him. In this mystery he expiates the vanity and excess of the great ones of the world, who spend, in clothes and superfluous ornaments, not only that which is due to the necessities of his members, but even that of which they are frequently stripped and spoiled. All the crowns of the earth, and the purple of kings, how bright and glorious soever they be, must pay homage to this crown of thorns and to this purple. The homage which these require of them is that they use their utmost endeavours in causing their people to serve Jesus Christ, maintaining and supporting the truths of Christianity, and the faithful ministers of the church, with all the authority which God has given them.

18. And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews!

He expiates the pride of those who exact or receive from their subjects such honours as are almost divine. To observe in the church the posture and countenance of abundance of Christian professors, one would take them rather for Jews or pagan soldiers, who insult and mock Christ, than for Christians, who come to adore their Saviour and their King. Would to God the clergy themselves did not contribute to this irreverence, either by their cowardice in bearing with it, or by their negligence in instructing others, or by their own bad example.

19. And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing *their* knees worshipped him.

He expiates that excessive resentment which men have of the least injuries which are done them, their inclination to revenge, and the transports of their passions. The insults of these pagan soldiers, who know not Christ, affect him less sensibly in this day of his humiliations and sufferings than the carelessness, forgetfulness, and irreligion of Christians, who make profession that they believe in him, and look upon him as their Saviour. Let us pray to God, and worship him in Jesus Christ; but let us do it in such a manner as is worthy

both of God and of Christ. If to bow the knees be to worship Christ, these heathens do it as well as we. It is the heart which prays and worships; the modest and reserved behaviour is but the sign, and, as it were, the visible sacrament of the invisible adoration.

SECT. III.—THE CROSS CARRIED.—JESUS CRUCIFIED.—THE THIEVES.

20. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

A God, become the jest and sport of his creatures, expiates the sacrilege of his creatures who make a jest of God and religion. Every one has his particular way of making a mock of these, which is either more or less criminal: some do it in a more gross and sensible, others in a more private and spiritual manner; ecclesiastical persons after one fashion, and worldly people after another; some with deliberate purpose and out of an extravagant gayety of mind, others through carelessness, ignorance, or custom, and, as it were, without perceiving it. The wicked do but too nearly resemble these soldiers: if they cease to mock Christ, it is only in order to crucify him by other sins.

21. And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.

Happy is that person who bears his cross in following Christ, though against his own inclination! There are scarce any crosses and afflictions in the world which are purely voluntary, and which a man would embrace by his own choice; but that which in its original is, as it were, forced, becomes voluntary by acceptance. The silence of this man is to us a testimony of his patience, his peaceableness, and his adherence to the cross of Christ; or at least a lesson, which teaches us what we ought to do under those afflictions which may fall upon us.

22. And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.

The true Isaac carries the wood for his sacrifice to the very place appointed for his immolation. He suffers, and offers

himself without the gate, (Heb. xiii. 12,) to show that we must expect our sanctification and salvation from his sacrifice only, and not from the sacrifices offered in Jerusalem according to the law; and that it is a universal sacrifice which is to redeem, sanctify, and save, not the Jewish people alone, but all the nations of the earth.

23. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received *it* not.

All humanity is changed into cruelty to augment the sufferings of Christ, and yet the sinner would fain have every thing changed into delights for his own ease and gratification. Christ tastes a little of this bitter, intoxicating, and strengthening liquor, that he may suffer the bitterness of it; he refuses the rest, to show that he was resolved to endure all the pains of the cross, to offer his sacrifice with a perfect freedom of mind, and not to defer the moment of his death and the completion of his sacrifice by repairing his strength. How wonderful, O Jesus, is the whole economy of thy sufferings! It is peculiar to thee alone to suffer with this freedom of mind, this strict conformity to the will of God thy Father, and this insatiate love of sufferings.

24. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

Christ is humbled even in his garments, which had been often the instruments of his goodness and mercy toward his people. Ecclesiastical revenues being the patrimony of the poor, are, in respect of them, to be looked upon as the garments of Christ, who had no other goods upon earth but that only which served to cover his body. What then can we think when we see them become the lot and portion of soldiers, but only that this part of Christ's passion is renewed daily among Christians? When clergymen by profession are likewise professed gamesters, though they have no revenues but what belong to the church, do they not justly deserve to be looked upon as soldiers who, at the very foot of the cross, cast lots for the patrimony of Christ crucified, and the garments of his members?

25. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.

Who will give us a heart worthy to adore Jesus Christ nailed to the cross as a victim laid upon the altar, and there offering to his Father, in behalf of his church, the grand sacrifice of his love and of his life? This cross is not only the altar of sacrifice, but also the pulpit of the true teacher, the nuptial bed of the bridegroom who produces us from his wounds, and the tribunal of the sovereign Judge. Every one of these qualities requires particular duties, which we ought carefully to study and to pay him with fidelity.

26. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Death is so far from destroying the regal power in Christ, as it does in earthly kings, that it is, on the contrary, the very foundation thereof. He becomes the King of the true Jews, of the Israel of God, and of all nations, by overcoming their true enemies, namely, death, the devil, and sin, and obtaining for them the true salvation, and the right to reign with him. Let me not be so unjust, O Jesus, my King and my Deliverer, as to dispute with thee the sovereignty of my heart, which has cost thee so dear.

27. And with him they crucified two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.

In death, that which passes before the eyes of men may be common to the righteous and the wicked; but that which passes in the sight of God is very different. Those who have any ambition to reign with Christ must expect to be crucified with him; and even those who have no such ambition will, notwithstanding, be certainly crucified in some manner or other. The former, with the cross of Christ, purchase heaven; the latter hell, with the cross of the devil: all Christians and all mankind are thus divided.

28. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.

Christ, by being numbered with the transgressors at the time of his death, merits for us the favour of being placed in the number of children, upon our receiving our own death in the spirit of humility and repentance. The sentiments which

these people have of Christ crucified, teach us not to fall in with the judgment of the greatest number. He passes for a notorious malefactor in the opinion of all, except a very few who dare not declare their thoughts. We frequently judge of the eternal state of a sinner by the manner of his death; but God, perhaps, judges very differently concerning it: that person dies the death of malefactors who is an elect of God.

SECT. IV.—BLASPHEMIES.—DARKNESS.—CHRIST CRIES OUT, AND DIES.

29. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, 30. Save thyself, and come down from the cross.

He who is fastened to the cross out of obedience and love will never come down from it of his own accord. It is not sufficient that a man live under mortification and the cross, he must likewise die therein. It is sometimes a great temptation to those who suffer for the sake of Christ, to see that their sufferings are an occasion of dishonouring God, and insulting piety and religion. It is their part to continue faithful to God in their state and condition; it is God's to take care to put a stop to the blasphemy, and to secure the honour of piety.

31. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.

If Christ had saved himself, he could not then have saved others. There is a time to suffer and a time to act. It is not always a proper time to repress the insults which are made against the truth: there are some seasons when it is better to suffer and to be silent, than to work miracles and to make apologies. Human reason cannot comprehend how any one can save himself from suffering, when he does not save himself at all; and it imagines that it argues very justly in concluding that Christ wrought only false miracles for others, since he wrought none for himself. O cross of my Saviour, it is in many different ways that thou confoundest the wisdom of the world!

32. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.

An earnest desire to see is but a very ill disposition in

order to believe. Had Christ descended from the cross and not died, all faith had been quite destroyed, and he could not have been either the author or finisher of it. See here another delusion of human pride, to imagine that miracles are of themselves sufficient to engage men to believe: as if faith were not a gift of God. These men will believe, they say, if Christ save himself from death; when they themselves had seen him raise one who had been dead four days, without any other effect than increasing in envy, incredulity, and hardness of heart. So greatly does the sinner deceive himself.

33. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

It is the sinner's blindness, it is our own, which is represented by this darkness. Such is the heart which has given itself its death-wound by means of sin, and has now no other hold of God but only by some small remains of faith. Exceeding happy in its misfortune, if the light of grace return, and prevent it from expiring under its darkness. Christ hereby plainly showed that his death was to recover the world out of the darkness of sin and error. It has recovered us out of it: forever blessed be his holy name for this mercy.

34. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

The cry of the heart is the prayer of charity or love, and the loud cry of Christ's heart is the prayer of his love, which causes him to give his life for us, and which implores the greatest mercy for his church. Hear this cry, O my God, and let it be the peace of thy church! Christ is forsaken by his Father, on no other account but only because the sinner deserved to be so, and to the end that he may not. Strange and wonderful dereliction this! which, exposing Christ to the rage of his creatures, unites him to his Father in a more close, holy, and divine manner, as his true victim. Why? It is because God thy Father loved mankind so exceedingly; it is because thou, O Jesus my Saviour, gavest thyself up to his justice, that thou mightest be the victim of the world; it is

because thy Spirit had forsaken sinners, and could not possibly be restored to them but by the effusion of thy adorable blood.

35. And some of them that stood by, when they heard *it*, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.

The last words of Christ are so much the more worthy of a singular regard and reverence, because they are dishonoured by these impious wretches, and because they discover to us the most holy dispositions of Jesus Christ, his greatest internal sufferings, and the most violent impression of God, as being infinite justice and holiness itself upon his Son made sin, that is, the victim of sin for us. He bears alone all the affronts and insults of the priests and the people, of Jews and Gentiles, and of the companions and witnesses of his sufferings, because he alone bears, expiates, and destroys all the sins of the whole world.

36. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put *it* on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.

Malice persecutes Christ to the very last. He expiates the sharpness and bitterness of our words, and the licentiousness of our tongue, by what he suffers in his own. See here all the consolation the creatures give their Creator while he is suffering for them: namely, infidelity, sharpness, and bitterness. The sharpness and bitterness of a heart full of gall, animosity, and revenge against one's brother, are, without comparison, more grievous to Christ than those here tasted by him, which are only an emblem of the other. It is by the sweetness and gentleness of charity that Christ requires men should comfort him in his sufferings.

37. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

This cry is a testimony of Christ's divinity, at the same time that his death gives one of his humanity. The cry of our sins gives him death; his cry, which offers his death to his Father, delivers us from death. All nature ought to be annihilated at the death of its God; but he requires no more than the annihilation and death of sin in us. Let us pay him at least adoration, thanksgiving, humiliation, love, and all

the other duties of which the heart of man is capable toward his God dying for him.

SECT. V.—THE MIRACLES AFTER CHRIST'S DEATH.—THE CENTURION.—THE HOLY WOMEN.

38. And the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

Behold all the mysteries which are just going to be discovered. The veil of the true sanctuary will now immediately be opened to men, by the rending of the veil of Christ's flesh. The death of the true victim puts an end to the figurative sacrifices, and to all the carnal righteousness of the Jewish temple. The whole earth is about to become the temple of God by the sacrifice of charity, in which alone the true righteousness consists, and by the sacrifice of the eucharist, which will everywhere renew the memory of that which is just now accomplished on mount Calvary, and will publish this truth in all places, that Christ died for the salvation of the whole world.

39. ¶ And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

A powerful and miraculous cry this! It opens the eyes and the heart of the centurion, because for him it is accompanied with the internal cry of grace which is represented by it. There is a loud cry at the death of Christ; there was the same at the resurrection of Lazarus: to show that our blessed Saviour's death was to merit for us the grace to rise to the true life. The faith and confession of the centurion are the first-fruits of the faith of the Gentiles, and a prophetic sign of their being preferred before the Jews. As Christ during his whole life gave himself to the Jews, so immediately upon his death he begins to declare for the Gentiles by this first grace.

40. There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; 41. Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him; and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.

Grace, which is the fruit of the death of Jesus Christ,

triumphs in the weaker sex, by rendering these women faithful in their attendance at the cross, to teach man to glory in his own weakness if he would receive the strength of Jesus Christ. These holy women satisfy the bashfulness and modesty of their sex, in keeping at some distance from this spectacle; they satisfy their love and their duty, in not losing sight of the Saviour of the world during his sacrifice. The love of life and the fear of death are the things which most strongly oppose the obligation under which we lie to follow Jesus Christ suffering and dying for us; the grace to be freed from those obstacles is the fruit of having followed Christ in his life by imitating him, and of having liberally distributed alms among his poor members, as these pious women had done.

SECT. VI.—JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.—THE BURIAL.

42. ¶ And now, when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43. Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.

Whoever with faith expects and waits for the kingdom of God, exposes himself boldly to the greatest perils of this present life. God knows how to find proper persons for his work, how dangerous soever it may be, when he designs to employ them therein. None but Christ could have found friends of condition after such a death, because none but he could give himself such by the sovereign power which he had over hearts. None of Christ's known and professed disciples have any share in his burial, because it was requisite there should be unsuspected witnesses of the certainty of his death; nor have his apostles any thing to do in it, because by their cowardice they deserved to be deprived of this honour; nor even Peter himself, because he was taken up in bewailing his own death.

44. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling *unto him* the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead.

The time of Christ's death is not subjected to the general and common laws, but solely to the will of God, and even to the power of the person who dies. How wonderful is the

wisdom of God in the methods which it takes, almost in an imperceptible manner, to have witnesses of the truth of his Son's death, and to obviate the objections of those who were to deny it!

45. And when he knew *it* of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.

This faithful disciple is paid in ready money for his fidelity and courage, by his receiving as a gift the victim of God, the treasure of the church, the sacred bud from whence salvation is to spring, and the precious grain of wheat which contains the kingdom of God. We seldom expose ourselves to great dangers for the sake of God without being rewarded immediately, at least by the comfort of having done our duty, and of having secured to ourselves, in some measure, the possession of Jesus Christ to all eternity.

46. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre.

Whoever is dead to sin with Jesus Christ, ought, (1.) To receive Christ with a pure heart. (2.) By the assistance of his ministers to remove himself from the place or occasions of sin wherein he was dead. (3.) As it were to wrap up Christ in his heart, by preserving him therein with great care. (4.) To make of his heart a living sepulchre, by the remembrance of Christ's death. (5.) To hew this sepulchre out of a rock, that is, to found and root it in Christ by an unshaken faith. (6.) To shut it up from the world, and the occasions of sin and distraction of mind, by retirement and silence. (7.) So to order the matter that Christ himself, by his word and grace, may be the living stone rolled unto the door of this living sepulchre.

47. And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother* of Joses beheld where he was laid.

Let us imitate these holy women, and take care like them not to lose sight of Christ, but to follow him everywhere by a persevering faith and an indefatigable fidelity. In his life, in his death, at the sepulchre, everywhere he is our God and our Saviour, everywhere adorable, everywhere infinitely worthy to be sought after and followed. That society is very

pleasant, extremely profitable, and highly acceptable to God, which is between two souls united together only to follow Christ, to seek him in the poor, to honour him in his mysteries, and mutually to assist each other in discovering where he is laid and where they may find him, in order to perform their duty to him either in himself or in his members.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECT. I.—THE RESURRECTION.— THE HOLY WOMEN AT THE SEPULCHRE.—ANGELS.

1. And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

Faith seeks after life in the very sepulchre of Christ, and it will find even more than it seeks, because it seeks it as it ought, and out of a principle of obedience. A solid and substantial devotion is always regular, does every thing in its proper time, and is very far from neglecting what is commanded for that which is not. The Spirit of God, which guides these holy women, permits them not to dispense with the observance even of a dying law, that so they may perform a service to Christ which could be deferred but a very little while.

2. And very early in the morning, the first *day* of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

True charity, as well as faith, is active and diligent; and neither death is capable to extinguish it, nor grief to render it slothful and feeble. The diligence of these women will not have the success they promise themselves from it, but it will have something which is much better. The work is done, in the sight of God, when once a man puts himself in a readiness to do it; good dispositions are never lost; the endeavours of charity are never fruitless and unsuccessful.

3. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

Love regards no difficulty nor danger; it considers nothing

but the will and desire of the beloved object. A person must needs have a very great stock of faith, to see difficulties which in all appearance are inextricable, and yet, notwithstanding, to go forward trusting entirely to Providence. It is prudence to foresee difficulties; but it is a prudence more holy and evangelical to obey the call of God when he calls us to any work, and to depend upon him for those means whereof we ourselves are utterly unprovided.

4. And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

God generally removes the greatest obstacles in those affairs which a man undertakes, for his sake alone, with courage and faith. Human measures often fail even in the easiest undertakings; those measures which God makes use of for those persons who in the most difficult undertakings put their trust in him, never fail. It is upon him alone that we must on all occasions continually depend.

5. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

He who, by retiring from the world, as it were, buries himself with Christ, finds therein true comfort and consolation from God, though he is frequently not sensible of it at first. It is as much out of modesty as surprise, that these holy women are alarmed and affrighted at the sight of a young man shining with light. The appearance of an angel ought to be suspected by a soul which has no reason to think itself worthy of such a favour, and which knows both that the devil often transforms himself into an angel of light, and that even a man may become a devil to seduce and destroy it.

6. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

A man ought not to bury himself in retirement, unless it be in order to seek there Jesus Christ crucified. This way of life is frightful at first; but this fright is soon changed into holy delight and satisfaction. It is in retirement that one learns by experience that Christ is risen indeed, by par-

taking of his new life, by living on the hopes of rising with him, and, by means of faith, tasting beforehand the joys of heaven.

7, But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

It is in retirement that Jesus, risen again, goes continually before those who seek him crucified, dead, and buried, in giving them an example, and removing all the difficulties which lie in their way; it is there that they are confirmed and strengthened in the hope of seeing him one day in the glory of his resurrection. God takes care to comfort true penitents, and to raise the spirits of those who, like Peter, are cast down at the remembrance of their faults.

8. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any *man;* for they were afraid.

God suffers the most fervent to experience the inconstancy, fears, and infirmities of this life, on purpose to make them desirous of another. He obliges men to purchase the graces and consolations of this life by inward pains and troubles, every one in his way.

SECT. II.—CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO MARY MAGDALENE AND THE TWO DISCIPLES.

9. ¶ Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

The constancy, fidelity, and perseverence of Mary Magdalene at the cross, in some measure deserved to be rewarded with the first visit of Christ risen from the dead. God is pleased in a particular manner to favour those who have been faithful to him in time of persecution, and have not been ashamed of his cross, on purpose to show how faithful he is to his promises. The service of the devil and sin has its flattering and deceitful sweets, which terminate at last in the utmost misery; the service of Jesus Christ and of righteousness is attended with crosses, but such as are full of spiritual unction and hope, and which end in solid joys, and in the vision of God himself.

10. *And* she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

God here makes choice of a faithful soul rather than of an apostle, to be the messenger of joy, comfort, and encouragement to afflicted and dejected minds, that he may honour fidelity, and teach pastors to prefer it before mighty works and extraordinary gifts. Jesus Christ, by the double instance of Mary Magdalene and of the apostles, confirms this important truth, which he had laid as part of the foundation of his morality, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

12. ¶ After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.

How fervent is the charity of the good Shepherd! He follows his sheep which fly from him, to bring them back to his flock, and applies himself as carefully to every one of them as if it were the only one he had. The Shepherd risen from the dead, gathers his sheep together which his death had scattered abroad: thus persecutions separate and disperse the disciples of Christ, causing them to partake of his cross and death, in order to be one day reunited in the participation of his glorious life.

13. And they went and told *it* unto the residue: neither believed they them.

The resurrection is the most difficult mystery to be believed; it is properly the faith of Christians, and the foundation of their religion. This incredulity of the apostles is a fault, but a fault which is beneficial to the church and to the faith itself. The more backward the apostles are in believing the resurrection of the Son of God, the fitter will they be to procure it credit, and to be the witnesses of it. God is a most admirable architect; he makes every thing, good or bad, serviceable to his building: but the good use which he makes of bad materials is his praise, without being their justification.

SECT. III.—CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO THE ELEVEN.—THEIR MISSION.—MIRACLES PROMISED.—THE ASCENSION.

14. ¶ Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

Jesus leaves not his elect in unbelief or hardness of heart; he does not flatter them in their sin, but makes them bear the shame of it in this life. After a promise so often repeated to the apostles of rising the third day, besides the prophecies and figures concerning it which he had explained to them, this was an inexcusable incredulity. How much more so, then, is that of the wicked, after such a number of miracles, after the faith of all nations and of all ages!

15. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Observe here the effects of the resurrection: (1.) The universal mission. (2.) The calling of the Gentiles. (3.) The faith, sanctification, and salvation of the elect. (4.) The infidelity, obduration, and damnation of the reprobate. Not to believe, is enough to condemn us; but to believe is not enough to justify us, unless we believe with that lively faith which worketh by love, which includes and fulfils the whole law. Christ ordinarily requires nothing but faith here in order to salvation, and, in the two following verses, in order to the gift of healing and miraculous works: the reason is, because faith being the foundation, the root and the bud of all other virtues and necessary dispositions, denotes and comprehends them all.

17. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

The name of Jesus is terrible to the devil. It is a weapon which he leaves to his church wherewith to cast him out and to subdue him, and to triumph over hell and sin even to the end of the world. It is a very great fault in Christians to put so little trust in it, to use it either too seldom or on trivial occasions, without respect, religion, faith, or attention,

or without reliance upon this promise. It is employed in casting out the devil when it is used against all evil thoughts or impure desires, and against all his suggestions and temptations.

18. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

A lively faith puts the power of God into the hands of men, casts out the devil of sin, causes them to speak the language of heaven, clears the heart of man from its venom and malignity, and cures all the faintness and sickness which proceed from sin. A man has no reason to fear any manner of adversity when charity has gained the ascendant in him over concupiscence.

19. ¶ So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

The whole gospel, and all the grandeur of the Christian religion, is reducible to this, namely: "That we have such an High-Priest, who is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;" that he "is there set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, being the Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." Heb. viii. 1, 2; ix. 24.

20. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with *them*, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

Could the gospel possibly end after a manner more comfortable, than with the promise of the co-operation of Christ with the ministers of his word? A co-operation both external and internal; the one by miracles and the other assistances of his providence; the other, by the operation of his grace in the heart. Our whole confidence, O my Saviour, depends upon our knowledge of thy almighty power in opening our hearts to thy word. This is the only hope of the church! Vouchsafe, Lord, to grant her such ministers of thy word as may deserve to have it accompanied in their mouth with the co-operation of thy grace! It is this which does all, both with and without miracles. These are not necessary for us; but without the operation of thy healing grace we can do nothing.

THE

GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST,

ACCORDING TO

L U K E.

CHAPTER I.

SECT. I.—LUKE'S PREFACE.

1. Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, 2. Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;

It is a very great proof of the truth of religion, and of the certainty of those things which the evangelists relate, that they were written by a great number of historians, without support, pretensions, combination, or human talents; that they were written while they were all fresh, in the midst of the most violent opposition of the Jews against the gospel, and yet no one at that time writing any thing to the contrary; that they were written without any heat, invectives, or bitterness, though they are no other than the history of the most unjust and cruel persecution, and even death of their Master; that they were taken from eye-witnesses, have been received by all the world, and confirmed by innumerable miracles.

3. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, 4. That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

Luke is the proper evangelist of the birth of John the Baptist, and of all the particulars of the incarnation, infancy, and

first mysteries of Jesus Christ. A man ought neither to write nor speak concerning divine and religious matters, till he has been exactly instructed in them by persons worthy of credit; and then he must do it not to satisfy either vanity or curiosity, but only to make known the truth. God frequently makes use of one particular occasion to enlighten the whole church; and a writing, composed by the author only for one particular person, through the appointment, conduct, and inspiration of God, becomes a public and divine book. Let us adore, admire, and thank providence, for the care it takes about the instruction both of private persons and of the whole church. Let us profit by all we read, as being written for every one of us?

SECT. II.—THE ANGEL'S APPEARANCE TO ZACHARIAS.—JOHN BAPTIST'S BIRTH FORETOLD.—ZACHARIAS DUMB.

5. ¶ There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth. 6. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Happy that marriage, where all is sacerdotal on both sides: by the consecration of the heart to God; by a disengagement from earthly riches; by a love of purity; by faithfulness to God's law; by a zeal for his glory; by constancy in prayer; by a spirit of sacrifice; and by an inviolable application to all the duties of religion. The nobility of John is founded on a long succession, not of kings nor of great captains, but of persons consecrated to God; not on the authority or wealth of his parents, but on their piety, which consists in fulfilling the law of God.

7. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren; and they both were *now* well stricken in years.

Mysterious is this barrenness of nature, which gives occasion to a fruitfulness of grace. Those who know how to value as they ought the blessing of the new law, which is to be a child of God and a member of Christ, afflict themselves but little at being deprived of the blessing of the old law, which

consisted in having children, and giving members to the synagogue. Here is mention made of barrenness, but none of murmuring or vexation. The righteous receive the outward gifts of God with gratitude, but they can bear the want of them with submission.

8. And it came to pass, that, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, 9. According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

One priest alone, intent on his duty, who diffuses the sweet savour of Christ, and is constant in prayer, draws down on the people more blessings than a great number of negligent priests. A man ought to discharge all the ecclesiastical functions with the spirit of the sacred ministry as before God, and under his immediate inspection; to perform them in order, in his proper station, without ambitiously seeking a higher; to do nothing merely of his own will, but to observe the well-established customs as being the necessary securities of peace. This is the truth which these shadows prefigured, and these the dispositions worthy of a minister of the true temple, which is the church; and of the true incense, which is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

10. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.

Nothing is more powerful in drawing down the blessings of God, than a people well united in heart to their holy pastor in prayer. "The time of incense," as to Christians, is the time of prayer. This fidelity of the Jews, in respect of the figure, will condemn Christians who do not esteem the truth as they ought. Nothing is more edifying or praiseworthy than this diligent attendance of the laity.

11. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

It is the prayer and the sacrifice of the church which draw down on her, her ministers, and her children, the favours of God, and the knowledge of his secrets and mysteries. It is to a holy bishop, or a holy priest, that God discovers himself most. Such a one is to the people the same which the angel

is to this priest—a messenger, an ambassador from God, to declare his promises. The angel of the sacrifice is not visible at the altar; but he is always present there, to carry and present the Christian people's sacrifice before the Majesty of God.

12. And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

Under illuminations, apparitions, and extraordinary manifestations, a man ought always to be afraid. The more humility accompanies the divine illumination, the greater apprehension does it give of the false light of the prince of pride. To know that he transforms himself sometimes into an angel of light, is sufficient to make us continually in fear of his seductions. Trouble produces assurance, and fear gives peace, when they proceed from humility.

13. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

Good angels comfort those whom their presence troubled at first. Good priests, mindful of the wants of the church and people, are heard both as to those of the church and as to their own, which perhaps they did not at all consider. Zacharias prayed for the Messiah, according to the spirit of the law; and he is thought worthy to have the forerunner of the Messias for his own son. The promise of a son is but a small matter, unless a man can reasonably hope that he will prove a child of grace. Zacharias receives the promise of it in this prophetic name of John, who was to be the first-fruit, the apostle, and the harbinger of Christian grace.

14. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

To have joy in the birth of saints, and particularly in that of the forerunner of Jesus Christ, is to honour our Saviour and his grace. To promise this joy to a father who knew no other joy but that of the Holy Ghost, is to promsise him every thing for his son. The gifts of God are not a true subject of joy, but only when they are to us a pledge of his love, and of the birth or new coming of Christ in us by his Spirit. All

joy which has no relation to him, is a joy of the world; a joy which comes not from heaven; a joy which we must lament.

15. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. 16. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 17. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Angels have no notion of human greatness, and are far from bringing tidings concerning any thing of that nature. The forerunner of him who came to render it contemptible, and to contemn it himself, can have no other greatness but such as makes him conformable to the Son of God in his state of humiliation. Nothing is truly great, but what is so in the sight of God. John's greatness arises, (1.) From his mortified life. (2.) From the fulness of God's Spirit in him. (3.) From his zeal to make Christ known. (4.) From his fidelity and courage in rebuking vice, in reviving in the Jews the spirit of the patriarchs, and preparing the hearts of the people for Jesus Christ. Give thy church, my God, such bishops and preachers as know and desire no other greatness but what consists in humbling themselves before thy Majesty, and in sacrificing their lives to make thee known and adored.

18. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

Men ought not to fear any natural impediments when the God of nature declares his will, which no obstacle can hinder. God has a right to be believed on his word alone, without any other pledge of his promise. Some persons blame this distrust of Zacharias, surprised at the appearance of an angel, and at such extraordinary news, who, even in cold blood, and on all occasions, are themselves full of distrusts and uncertainties. Diffidence is less excusable in a bishop or in a pastor, who ought to be, as it were, God's security with men. God permits the imperfections of the most holy, in order to promote his own glory, to confirm their grace by humility, and to comfort the weak.

19. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.

A priest, a bishop, in serving the church, should imitate the angels, who quit not the presence of God in their employments toward men. A man of vows and prayer like Zacharias, who longed for the Messiah, whose heart was full of the prophecies of his coming, needed only the name of Gabriel to put him into the way, and to make him understand that the weeks foretold by the same angel to Daniel were about to be accomplished. It is good to fill our minds with the divine Scriptures: one word, on particular occasions, is sufficient to enlighten and set us right.

20. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

The holiness of God renders him severe in punishing the least faults of the saints. What rigorous treatment, then, have not the wicked reason to expect? A thought, a word of distrust, is a fault which is more considerable in those who know by experience the goodness and power of God. A silence of nine months for one distrustful word is in God's judgment a proportionable penance. It is thus that we may make some atonement for the guilt of such words as are contrary to that respect and confidence which are due to the word of God.

21. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. 22. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

Zacharias is an emblem of the Jewish people, who gave not birth to Christ till in their old age, who were become speechless by their not having any longer prophets among them, and who spoke no more of the Messias to come but only by the signs of sacrifices and other figures. Let us here observe the charity of a good people toward their pastor, whose silence they look upon not as a punishment, but as an effect of a visit from God. Let us learn to put a favourable inter-

pretation always, if we can, on that which happens to the clergy and to others.

23. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

Ecclesiastical persons should not frequently appear in public, but only to discharge the functions of their ministry, and when that is done should return to the privacy and retirement of their own houses. A man ought to be exact, faithful, and intent in the performance of his duty, whatever happens, after the example of Zacharias, whom neither haste to carry such joyful news to his wife, nor the loss of his speech, could draw from the exercise of his ministry: far, therefore, should a man be from seeking pretences to be excused from it.

24. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,

It belongs to God to make known the extraordinary favours which he bestows on men. As for them, they ought to conceal them till either necessity or the glory of God obliges them to a discovery.

25. Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on *me*, to take away my reproach among men.

It is a favour to be exercised and tried; it is one also to be delivered,—each has its proper time. There is a sort of honour in the world which depends on the darkness or injustice of human judgments. Barrenness seems to be a punishment from God, and a disgrace to those who are ignorant of his ways, who value nothing but the present life and the enjoyments of this world, and who understand neither the excellence of virginity nor the advantages of spiritual fruitfulness. God some way or other still delivers those whom he loves: it is our duty to expect his time with confidence, and to leave the choice of our portion to him.

SECT. III.—THE ANNUNCIATION.

26. ¶ And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, 27. To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name *was* Mary.

At length the moment is come which is to give a Son to the

Virgin, a Saviour to the world, a Pattern to mankind, a Sacrifice to sinners, a Head to the angels, a Temple to the Divinity, a new Worshipper to the eternal Father, a new nature to his Son, and a new principle to the new world. Is it not very just and reasonable that we should prepare ourselves for reading the history of the abasement of the Word, by a profound humiliation of heart, by adoration, gratitude, love, etc.? This angel is sent from God, not to the palaces of the great, nor to the kings or emperors of the earth, but to the poor maid, to the wife of a carpenter. Great degrees of grace are but seldom conferred on the great. The Son of God comes to humble these, and to honour poverty, weakness, and contempt. He chooses an obscure place for the mystery which is most glorious to his humanity; and for that which is most degrading, he will choose the greatest city. How far are men from such a conduct as this!

28. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee; blessed *art* thou among women.

The state wherein the angel finds the Virgin is retirement; this is that in which God is wont to diffuse his greatest favours. The Lord is in her by his grace, which fills and sanctifies her; he is with her by his power, which governs and protects her; and he is very mindful of her by his love, which chooses her, and raises her above other women by the honour of being the mother of Jesus. The angel knows the bottom and inclinations of her heart, and he praises that which he admires. What woman is there who had not rather one might tell her that she is full of wit, and a person of great fortune and quality; that lords and princes are always with her, suing and making court to her; and that she is noble, handsome, and beautiful among women? The fulness of God's grace, the fellowship with Jesus Christ, and the benediction and unction of the Holy Ghost,—these are the things whereof one ought to be ambitious, and these are they which Mary values more than all the things of this world.

29. And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

This trouble is a trouble of grace, of light, of holiness, of

prudence, of application, and of adherence to God. They who are truly humble are always troubled when they hear themselves praised. Nothing is more reasonable or holy than such trouble, because they are then exposed to pride. A virgin ought always to be troubled when she is alone with the other sex: too great a security is very dangerous. The person who guards a treasure should watch continually; and watchfulness is never without some disquiet. Would to God that the fear alone of being wanting in their fidelity to him, would, after the blessed Virgin's example, trouble all those of her sex who expose themselves so easily to the violation of their promises or vows!

30. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. 31. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

Here are four marks of Mary's greatness: (1.) Her election by pure grace and favour to be the mother of Jesus. (2.) The incarnation of the Word in her. (3.) His birth from her womb. (4.) The right of giving him the name of Saviour. What a gift is this, which God bestows on us in giving us his only Son! He is given to the Virgin as a Son by the Father, when she conceives him by the virtue of the Holy Ghost. She gives him to the world as a King, in giving him birth. He gives himself to mankind as a Saviour, when he takes that name upon him. Who will give us the grace to receive him with dispositions approaching those of the Virgin—her humility, purity, fidelity, etc.?

32. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Here are four marks of the greatness of Jesus: (1.) The elevation of his human nature to the divine, by its union with the Word. (2.) His filiation according to the Divine nature. (3.) His sovereignty over his church. (4.) The eternity of his kingdom—the only one which has no end, while those of the earth pass away like a shadow. How adorable is thy goodness, O Jesus, to make those partakers of thy greatness from whom thou receivest nothing but mean-

ness in thy incarnation! The Christian in this life is made partaker of the divine nature in Christ, and enters into his filiation by the adoption of the Father; in the other, he will partake of his sovereignty and of the eternity of his kingdom. My God, what disengagement from earthly things does not the Christian grace require of us!

34. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

The first care of a virgin regards her virginity. One ought to be faithful in preserving that for God which one has once consecrated to him. The holy Virgin is the apostle of virginity; by her God makes it known to the world. Happy is that person who receives this gospel of purity! It is prudence not to engage blindly in the most sacred works. An inviolable engagement to God by a vow of virginity, gives a right of examining the proposal of any other engagement which might be contrary thereto. Does it not seem that the blessed Virgin's love of virginity, and her fidelity toward God, were so great that, rather than be wanting therein, she was ready to refuse the dignity of being the mother of Jesus if it had been inconsistent with them?

35. And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born *of thee* shall be called the Son of God.

Every one of the three divine Persons has his part in the mystery of the incarnation. The Holy Ghost, as Spirit of grace, sanctification, and love, fills, prepares, and raises the body of the Virgin. The eternal Father communicates to her his fruitfulness and patetnity, to render her his spouse, and mother of him of whom he is Father. The Son takes in and of her a new being and nature, which is sanctified by the Divinity itself. O my God, what a religion is that which is established upon such a foundation! What love in God, to bestow such a gift upon his creatures! What ingratitude in man, if he do not give himself entirely to his God, who gives him every thing,—if he do not with his whole heart love God, who loves him so exceedingly!

36. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. 37. For with God nothing shall be impossible.

It is as easy to God to unite fruitfulness with virginity as with barrenness and old age. God seldom fails to give signs of his great promises; but he would have men expect them from his goodness. These signs are new favours for those who, like the blessed Virgin, in all things depend on him. They are beneficial chastisements for those who ask them out of diffidence, as Zacharias did. The almighty power of God, which is the first article of the creed, is the principal foundation of religion and faith; because it is his almighty will which is the principle of all the operations of grace and mercy. It is on this account that in the creed we make confession of grace no otherwise than in confessing the almighty power of God.

38. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

God does his creature the honour to ask her consent to the mighty work which he purposes to effect in her; but he himself gives what he asks. The agreement of the almighty operation of God in the heart of man, with the free consent of his will, is immediately showed us in the incarnation as in the source and pattern of all the other operations of mercy and grace, all of them as free and as much depending on God as this original operation. Let us be faithful in submitting ourselves to the designs of God concerning us, though beyond the reach of our comprehension, with faith, humility, obedience, renouncing our own understanding, and resigning ourselves to his commands under the conduct and with the advice of some visible angel, full of prudence, knowledge, and the power of God. Can we ever forget this adorable moment of the incarnation of the Word, the fountain of every grace, the sacred first-fruits of all the mysteries of Christ, and which gives us Jesus Christ himself?

SECT. IV.—THE VIRGIN VISITS ELISABETH.

39. ¶ And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah;

Jesus, being incarnate in Mary, and become her spirit, her heart, and principle of action, inclines her to go seek John to sanctify him. How worthy to be imitated is this ardent zeal to propagate the Spirit of God in souls, and to consecrate them to him! The mother of Jesus is the pattern of it, both for all the faithful who conceive Jesus Christ in their hearts by faith, and chiefly for priests, who, bringing him forth in souls, have so particular a resemblance to the blessed Virgin. Mary is the first missionary of the evangelical law, who does that for her Son, and her Son by her, which his state and condition do not permit him to do by himself. Happy, and a thousand times happy they who imitate her, in crossing mountains, seas, and deserts, to convey Jesus Christ to those who know him not, and to seek souls in order to sanctify them by the communication and operation of the mystery of the Word incarnate!

40. And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

The haughtiness of men is here condemned by the humility of the mother of Jesus, who first salutes Elisabeth. They who preach Jesus Christ to others, must have a preventing humility; preventing, in respect both of those to whom they speak, and of those who are workers together with themselves,—both whom John represents as being the first-fruits both of believers and of preachers.

41. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

Can those who are envious of Mary's glory here avoid seeing that it is by her that the first communication of the Spirit of the incarnate Word is made, and that Jesus begins to diffuse grace and joy into souls? How does sometimes even one word of a holy person fill those with light and grace who hear it! The invisible infant of Mary works on that of Elisabeth; but by the tongue of the former and the

ear of the latter. This is a representation of what Jesus Christ, who resides invisibly in his church and ministers, works in souls by the ministration of the word heard with faith.

42. And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb.

The incarnation of the Word, and the maternity of the Virgin, are honoured and published first by Elisabeth. Who can forbear lifting up their voice in transports of joy, admiration, and gratitude, when they feel the sweet and powerful operations of grace in their heart? It is in and by the church (that virgin blessed among women) that grace works and makes itself perceptible. There is no fruit blessed but that of her womb, no blessing but in her bosom.

43. And whence *is* this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

And whence comes this happiness, that the Lord himself should come into us by the incarnation, by faith, and by grace!

44. For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

God did all things by his word in the first creation; he does all things by it in the second: and it is by the word that Christ did every thing while on earth, and that the church works in his name ever since he was in heaven. This is so on purpose to honour his eternal and incarnate Word, and continually to renew the sense of that dependence which we have on him. How oft has the word of God sounded in our ears, and we, perhaps, have been so far from imitating John as to be altogether insensible of it!

45. And blessed *is* she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

The amazing faith of a virgin so humble is instrumental in preparing a remedy for the fatal consequences of Eve's credulity. The latter, through pride and curiosity, believed the devil: the former, through humility and obedience, believes the angel Gabriel. Eve hoped that she should become like to God: Mary doubts not but that God would become

like to man. Presumptuous Eve gave admittance to falsehood and death: humble and faithful Mary becomes the mother of truth and life. What is not faith able to do, which draws down on the blessed Virgin such extraordinary graces? Faith is the source of true happiness; as all real misery proceeds either from not believing at all, or from believing faintly. Souls less perfect, and of much inferior virtue, are, notwithstanding, sometimes serviceable to the most eminent; and pastors are often assisted by the understanding of their flock, as God here makes use of Elisabeth to confirm the Virgin in the belief of the incarnation, and in the hope of the promises.

SECT. V.—THE SONG OF THE VIRGIN.

46. And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

An humble soul cannot hear its own praises long, but takes occasion thence to lift itself up to God, and to glorify him for his gifts; and this application to God is a seasonable diversion to keep off vanity, which attributes all to itself, and to ascribe all to him to whom it is due. This address must proceed from the bottom of the heart, and not from the bare lips; otherwise it is only a false humility and a double vanity.

47. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

Let Christians learn of the blessed Virgin to rejoice at God's favours only in him and for him. How rare is this pure, this holy joy, wherewith a person rejoices at the gift, not on the account of the advantage received by it, but of the glory which redounds to God, being more intent on him than on his gift! We must not receive his favours with sadness; and it is ingratitude not to rejoice at his mercies.

48. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

Mary, in answer to that expression of Elisabeth, "Blessed is she that believed," which seemed to attribute to her some peculiar merit independent of grace, declares that all her merit consists in the regard which God was pleased to show to her low estate, and which is the source of all the great things he has wrought in her. Praise having alarmed the blessed Virgin, she retires, and, as it were, entrenches herself

within her own humility. This is a fort which is impregnable: as long as one continues in it one is safe. The more God exalts any person, the more ought he to humble himself; and the more he humbles himself, the more will God seek him with the eyes of his mercy. Let us judge of the blessed Virgin's greatness by her humility, and of her humility by her greatness: for the one increased always in proportion to the other.

49. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy *is* his name. 50. And his mercy *is* on them that fear him from generation to generation.

Here we ought, with the Virgin, to adore the power, holiness, and mercy of God in all his works, and above all, in the incarnation, wherein they appear most conspicuous. Power, in respect of the Father, whose virtue operates in the Virgin; mercy, in reference to the Son, who, in taking our nature, becomes a merciful High Priest; and holiness, with relation to the Holy Ghost, who becomes the Sanctifier of Jesus Christ in his new nature. Holiness is a perfection whereby God retires, reposes, and, as one may say, secures himself within himself; which renders his name dreadful to his creatures, and is that inaccessible light in which he dwells. Mercy is a perfection which diffuses itself abroad, whereby God stoops to his creatures, and which renders him accessible even to the greatest sinners. These two perfections, so contrary in this respect, are reconciled and closely united together when God unites himself to man in the mystery of the God-man.

51. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

All the instances of God's power, which appeared in the deliverance of his people, in the victories over their enemies, in their establishment, and in all the wonders which preceded it in the wilderness, were only a shadow, and a preparation to the work of his arm, which is the incarnation, and to all the consequences of it in the forming of his church and the salvation of the elect. God, by humbling the proud, has always made it evident that pride is more displeasing to him than all other vices, that it is the great wound of man's heart,

and that it was in order to heal it, and to teach it humility, that the Son of God abased himself.

52. He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree. 53. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

All the instances of God's mercy, which appeared in the exaltation of those of low degree and in the liberal distribution of his blessings under the old law, were no more than a small specimen, a slight draught of the riches of his great mercy reserved for his church, and of the gift of his Son and his Holy Spirit, which was to raise fallen man, to supply all his wants, and completely satisfy all his wishes and desires. The blessed Virgin, being more hungry after these good things, and more ardently desirous of them, had also the happiness to be the more filled with them. Let us take great care lest the love of earthly things, which is always accompanied with a disgust toward heavenly, should render us unworthy of these, as it did the priests, the Pharisees, and the other rejected Jews.

54. He hath holpen* his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy; [* *Fr.* United to himself.]

All the instances of holiness and love, which appeared in God's covenant with his people, in the establishment of the law, of sacrifices, and of the whole legal sanctity, are nothing in comparision of that holiness and love which are found in the ineffable union of Christ with his church—the true Israel; of the Son with his holy mother, and of the Head with its members, by means of the still more holy and close union of the Word with the human nature, which is the effect of the pure mercy of God, and is, indeed, his greatest mercy.

55. As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

In short, the incarnation is the accomplishment of the promises, the miraculous birth of the true Isaac, the true Son of Abraham, and him for whom all the promises are reserved; the source of all true blessings, the bud which encloses all the elect, their grace, their sanctification, and eternal salvation. How many wonders, how many instructions are contained in this song, under a prophetic language, which ex-

presses at the same time the past, the present, and the future! When we love, in imitation of the blessed Virgin and her cousin, to feed on the divine Scriptures by reading joined with prayer, we then understand this language perfectly well, and profit thereby.

56. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

Charity is persevering, and never forsakes any one in time of need. The blessed Virgin's mission lasts three months; and during all that time Christ, by her ministry, works on the heart of his forerunner, in order to form himself in him. This is an instruction for missionaries and pastors of souls, who ought to give their people all the time which is necessary to change the heart, to destroy the habits of sin, to inform themselves of their duty, to know themselves thoroughly, to frame themselves to piety, and to lay the firm foundations of it in retirement and prayer. When a person has finished the work which God has given him to do, he must return to his own house, and resume his ordinary exercise and employments.

SECT. VI.—THE BIRTH OF JOHN BAPTIST.

57. ¶ Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. 58. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

Charity bears no envy toward our neighbour, but rejoices at the good which happens to him. All good is performed and possessed in common in the church; and all its members being obliged to labour for the body, and in the spirit of the body, the joy thereof ought also to be common.

59. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

The righteous are far from endeavouring to exempt themselves from general and ordinary laws, under pretence of extraordinary graces. John, though sanctified from his mother's womb, notwithstanding receives the sacrament of circumcision. Grace, which precedes the effect of sacraments

in the heart by a secret way, far from obstructing the use of common and public means, inclines and obliges thereto. John, as well as Abraham, "received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness which he had yet being uncircumcised;" because he was to be the first preacher of a righteousness and holiness which was independent of circumcision. Holiness and humility are characters which are inseparable.

60. And his mother answered and said, Not *so;* but he shall be called John. 61. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. 62. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. 63. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

The birth of John, rendered famous by many miracles, disposes men to believe the all-miraculous birth of the incarnate Word. Every thing is to be prophetic in John, every thing is to denote his mission. His name, which signifies the gift, the grace, and mercy of God, shows that he is to point out, as it were, with his finger, Him who is the gift of God, the Author of grace, and the Victim of mercy. A preacher ought to make the truths he delivers apparent and manifest in his person, and to be entirely a man of grace. Every thing in him should preach. A name so short and so holy as that of John, an express messenger from heaven, does it not condemn that affectation of a train of great names and long titles which are frequently used for state in the most apostolical employment, and in a ministry of humility and servitude?

64. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue *loosed*, and he spake, and praised God.

John made the first essay on his father of that which he was to do in the world, which was to open the ears and mouth of people that they might hear and bless God. Happy the penitent who, after the example of Zacharias, breaks silence only to praise Him who has showed mercy on him! It is highly just and reasonable to employ the gifts of God to his glory, and to consecrate to him both the first-fruits of them and the lump.

65. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill-country of Judea.

66. And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

All these wonders are going in a little time to be buried in the wilderness. The more holy this child is, and the more he is designed for great things, the more will God hide him from the world. By this birth, so eminent and illustrious, God would render the Jews intent on the time of that of the Messias, and induce them carefully to study the prophecies, that they might bear witness thereto.

67. ¶ And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

After that Zacharias has been purified by repentance, and his tongue sanctified by a silence of nine months, God fills him with his Spirit, and gives him the tongue of a prophet. One speaks quite otherwise of God when one has been a long time without either speaking to men or hearing them speak.

SECT. VII.—THE SONG OF ZACHARIAS.

68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

This song begins with thanksgiving for the two great benefits of the incarnation and redemption. This prophet counts the salvation of mankind as good as accomplished as soon as our Saviour is born, and that by his birth the designs of God begin to be put in execution. God visits us a Father by the person of his Son and word: the Word, as a sacrifice, redeems us by his blood. O my God, what a visit dost thou make to man! Thou enterest into a house of clay, into a mortal body, to make it thy victim, and to redeem thy people by thy sacrifice,—and yet scarce any one reflects upon it.

69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

Jesus Christ saves us by his power as King, and as the true David. David's victories, and the establishment of his kingdom, are but the figure and shadow of the victories of Christ, and of the establishment of his church. He chose to be descended of the royal house, that he might be the better received by the Jews, and that he might fulfil the promises:

but he would have this house be first decayed, that he might not partake at all of the lustre and greatness of it. The power of our blessed Saviour is not that of an earthly king, since it all consists in humiliation, abasement, poverty, weakness, etc.

70. As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

All the saints are so many witnesses of God's faithfulness in his promises.

71. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

The devil, death, and sin, are the enemies which Christ came to conquer. Sin is the most dangerous of all, and properly the only enemy we have to fear. The devil is without us; death is only in our flesh; sin is in our will: and to destroy this last there, an almighty Saviour is necessary. Lord, be thou the Saviour and Deliverer of my will, and exert upon it the omnipotence of thy saving hand!

72. To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

The old covenant is the figure of the union or alliance of the Word with our nature in the incarnation, and of the church with God by and in Jesus Christ: an alliance all of mercy, both in the promise and in the performance, and that in respect both of the patriarchs and of Christians. The virtue of Christ's mysteries extends even back to all past ages; and it is in the incarnation that Abraham and the other fathers receive the mercy and the covenant promised to them, and eternal salvation.

73. The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

How great is the goodness of God, to oblige himself to his creatures by oath! But how great the infidelity of his creatures, who do not believe even the oath of God! Abraham believed the incarnation of the Word, and all the promises comprehended in Jesus Christ, though he was not to receive the effect of them till almost two thousand years after his death. What confusion should this cast on those incredulous

persons who do not believe them, after they have been fulfilled and confirmed by the miracles and by the faith of so many ages, and are, as it were, continually exposed to their sight!

74. That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

The effect of the incarnation is to make us serve God, no longer by a slavish fear, but with a filial love; by a religion no longer ceremonial and figurative but substantial and internal; in a holiness and righteousness no longer legal, carnal, and transient, but Christian, spiritual, and eternal. The unchangeable promises of God are accomplished only in the body of the elect, whereof Christ is the head. The call to conversion, or the first justification, which delivers them from sin and takes them out of the devil's power—a Christian life, shown by works of true righteousness—and final perseverance —are the three principal effects of divine predestination and the oath of God, and the infallible way to glory, which is the fourth and last effect, and full completion of the promise.

76. And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; 77. To give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins,

Nothing is greater than to "go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways" in souls, since this is that which makes all the greatness of John. His function, and that of all spiritual guides, is to teach men Jesus Christ, and to prepare to receive from him "the knowledge of salvation, and the remission of their sins." There is a necessary connection between the true knowledge of salvation, and reconciliation with God; for, by filling themselves with bad principles and maxims remote from the gospel, men too often set themselves at a farther distance from God, and lull themselves asleep in a superficial piety. Teach us, Lord, this true knowledge of salvation, which will infallibly guide us to thee!

78. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

The incarnation, and the whole train of our blessed

Saviour's mysteries, the first light which shines on our heart, and the whole series of graces which work salvation, are the effects of the love and tender mercy of God. The incarnation is the rising of the Sun of righteousness, which is come to change the darkness of sin into the light of faith. Such, in respect of a sinner, is the first ray which strikes the eyes of his mind, in order to make him a child of light. These are two benefits, the one general, the other particular, both worthy of an eternal acknowledgment.

79. To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

The designs of God in the incarnation of his Son are: (1.) To dispel the darkness of ignorance, sin, and death. (2.) To turn our hearts, and all their inclinations, toward heaven. (3.) To give us the true peace of eternity.—There was nothing but darkness on earth when the Son of God came down upon it; there is nothing but darkness in the heart of man before that his grace begins to shine therein. It is by faith that he enlightens us; it is by this that he conducts his elect to his glory; it is this which is the sole way of evangelical peace in this life, and of beatific peace in the other, to which all the designs of God concerning his elect tend, and in which do terminate all the mysteries of Christ, and his whole conduct toward his church.

80. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

The duties of an evangelical preacher, before he begins his ministry, are, (1.) To grow in piety, by feeding on the bread of prayer. (2.) To give his zeal time to wax strong, by reading the Holy Scriptures. (3.) To continue in silence and retirement, until God is pleased to bring him forth and show him to the world. How many graces, how many lights, were for thirty years concealed in the deserts, while the darkness of ignorance and vice increased on the earth! Men deceive themselves when they imagine that they ought to produce and employ their talents without delay, and that they cannot hide them without violating the command of God. On the

contrary, they violate it in not waiting his proper time, but making the wants of their neighbour alone a sufficient call.

CHAPTER II.

SECT. I.—THE BIRTH OF THE SON OF GOD INCARNATE.

1. And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2. (*And* this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

The greatest princes often form magnificent designs, and undertake great enterprises, without knowing the reason of them. Augustus imagines that he is busied in advancing the glory of his name and the lustre of his reign, and at the same time his orders, by means of others more powerful and absolute than his, become subservient to the accomplishment of prophecies of which he is altogether ignorant; to the birth of a king, whom he will never know; and to the establishment of a monarchy which will subject his and all others to itself. This is what happens in all ages, and men take no notice of it.

3. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) 5. To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

There is nothing here but what seems to happen by chance; and yet every thing is ordered by Providence to ascertain and fix, by a public testimony, the knowledge of the time and place of the Messiah's birth, and of his extraction from the house of David. The Son of God, by being enrolled from his very birth as true man, gives security, as one may say, for his obedience, humility, and the performance of the promises. It is hereby very visible that his greatness, foretold by the angel, is not a human greatness. The poverty, trouble, and subjection to which Joseph and Mary are exposed, are the preparation for the gift which they are going to receive from God. Let us learn to submit ourselves to every ordi-

nance of man for the Lord's sake, and chiefly to the royal power, since we see Jesus Christ beginning to obey from, and even before his birth.

6. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

Christ, having submitted himself to the laws of nature, and to an imprisonment of nine months, hides the glory of his birth by being born in an obscure place; he teaches us to wean ourselves from our own country, and from this whole present world, by being born in a journey; he recommends poverty, mortification, and humility to us, by being born in a place borrowed from the brute beasts, and destitute of all conveniences and of all assistance. How many instructions are here for us, from this very first moment, if we can thoroughly understand them! Let us hear them in the spirit of adoration and lowliness.

7. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Jesus Christ is the first-born of the blessed Virgin; we are in some sense her younger children. His stooping to the weakness of infancy is so much the more worthy to be adored, as it appears more unworthy of his greatness and wisdom. Rejected of men, he borrows the habitation of beasts. Let human pride blush as long as it will, to have a God become an infant of a day, of a moment, reduced to the confinement of swaddling clothes, to the meanness of a manger, to the mansion of beasts, to have recourse to the assistance of his creatures, and to be refused by them. It is the Christian's glory that his God would do and suffer all this for his salvation; it is his honour to adore him, to own him for his King, and to pay him homage in all his states and conditions.

SEC. II.—THE SHEPHERDS.

8, And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. 9. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid.

Christ manifests himself to the simple and the poor rather

than to the learned and the rich. It is for vigilant pastors that the light of God is reserved, that they may know the mysteries of religion, and their own duties; the negligent are left in their darkness. From this moment, Lord, thou beginnest to show who they are whom thou choosest for thy kingdom, and whom thou dost reject.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

The birth of Christ is the joy of this world, and the world knows it not. The world has its vain and its criminal joys, and thereby becomes unworthy to have any part in the joy of our blessed Saviour's birth. This is a representation of that which happens every day: men have their hearts shut to heavenly things in proportion as they keep them open to earthly pleasures and desires.

11. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

This verse contains an abridgment of all that is great in the character of Jesus, which was propounded to the faith of the shepherds, and which God made known inwardly to them under the external sign of that light which shone round about them. As Son of David, and heir of the promises, he had a royal birth; as Saviour, a sovereign goodness; as Christ, the fulness of God's Spirit and of the sacerdotal and prophetic unction; and as the Lord, a divine power. What ought we not to hope from a Saviour in whom is found a sovereign power joined to an infinite goodness, which reduced him to the meanest condition for our sakes.

12. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Is this, then, O Lord, the sign of thy greatness, the ornament of thy royalty, and the throne of thy glory? O manger, of more value than all the most rich and precious things in the world, may I learn at thy foot that it is by humility that Christ comes to reign, and that this is the only way which leads to his kingdom! Pride is the character of the children of Adam; humility, the mark of the Son of God, and of the elect.

13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

God, by causing the spirits of heaven to honour his Son in the humble capacity of an infant, teaches those on earth, for whose sake he comes into the world, what homage they owe him in that state. Angels think themselves happy by their praises to advance the glory of a new-born infant, and to adore him as their God; and shall men disdain to do it? The manger of our blessed Saviour, as well as his cross, is to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles foolishness; his infancy, as well as his death, is the rock against which human pride is wont to split; but these things are the power and wisdom of God for the salvation of those who believe, and are the object even of the adoration of the angels.

14. Glory to God in the highest, and* on earth peace, good will toward men. [* *Fr.* Peace on earth to the men whom he loves.]

The two principal motives of the incarnation, are "the glory of God," and the reconciliation of men God: promises "peace on earth" to those whom he loves, but not rest. The peace of God consists in his love, to what trouble and storms soever this love may expose a Christian. The peace which reigns on earth at this time, is only to signify the birth of the God of peace.

15. ¶ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

When God puts it in any person's mind to seek Jesus Christ, to perform some duty toward him, or to apply himself to any of his mysteries, he ought to neglect nothing. The angel does not order the shepherds to go to Bethlehem; but to faithful souls it is enough only to propose, and make known the good, in order to engage them to undertake it. It is sufficient to a good Christian, and to a pious lady, barely to say, "Christ is in this poor tabernacle as in a manger, forsaken of all the world; he is in this poor wretch, almost naked, lodged in a miserable cottage, and destitute of every thing." This company of shepherds, who excite one another to go to Bethlehem, is an emblem of the religious societies of

those zealous persons, who, profiting by the exhortations and the light of their visible angels, mutually encourage one another to visit poor families, prisons, and fatherless infants, in honour of Jesus, once a poor infant, "wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger." Let us go even unto Bethlehem, the house of the bread of heaven. Would to God that those who are out of this house, that is, out of the church, would encourage one another to come thither and seek Jesus Christ, that they might there taste with us what "the Lord hath made known unto us."

16. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

Will not sinners blush at their niceness and profuseness as to their beds, beholding the Son of God in a manger? Whenever a good work presents itself to be done, far from losing any time, we ought immediately to follow the motions of grace for fear they should cease, and lest some other person should rob us either of the opportunity, or of the first-fruits of a pious work. This inversion of order, the wife named before the husband, and the creatures before the Creator, plainly denotes the inversion made by the incarnation.

17. And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

These shepherds give credit to the angel's word, without arguing; they see the meanness and poorness of the manger, without being offended; and they reflect upon the whole, without being in the least troubled: this is the advantage of an humble, simple, and submissive faith. How many false reasonings would philosophers have advanced on this occasion! With how many manifest contradictions would the great wits of the world have been perplexed!

18. And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

The shepherds, the first apostles of the child Jesus, are faithful in publishing the news of his birth. God gives a blessing to the simplicity of their relation, causing it to meet with credit everywhere. God does not love, nor give a blessing to that human prudence which thinks that the seeming

meanness of the mysteries of religion should be concealed. It belongs to man to obey without suppressing any thing, and to God to cause belief by inspiring faith.

19. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart.

Mary being consecrated, and having her mind raised to Christ, filled with his mysteries, and altogether intent on gathering the virtue, spirit, and grace of them, condemns the forgetfulness and negligence wherein Christians live in respect of those things which their blessed Saviour has done for them. In order to profit by the mysteries and truths of the gospel, it is not enough barely to keep them in memory; we must, in the presence of our Lord, entertain ourselves with them, and frequently meditate upon them, after the holy Virgin's example. To her we owe the first pattern of Christian meditation upon the life of Christ; let us follow so holy an example.

20. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

The shepherds imitate her, in adoring and glorifying God. This is the first effect of faith, the first duty of religion, and a tribute of acknowledgment due to the gift of God. The praise of these good people is as simple as their faith; and this is what God loves. And as "they returned glorifying and praising God," so true Christians ought, in the same manner, to return home from the church, whither they come to worship Christ, and to hear his mysteries, virtues, and precepts delivered and explained.

SECT. III.—THE CIRCUMCISION AND PURIFICATION.

21. ¶ And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Let us adore and imitate the exact obedience of Jesus to the particular law of circumcision, by which he engages himself to observe the whole Jewish law, as well according to the letter as to the spirit. Give me, Lord, the grace which thou hast hereby merited for me, to circumcise the pride and impurity of my heart, and whatever remains in me of Adam's

corruption. Christ, though innocent, takes upon him the mark, the shame, and the remedy of sin; and yet the sinner himself cannot bear them! The other instances of our blessed Saviour's humiliation come attended, as it were, with the credentials of some miracle: none appears in this. The law, which subjected only sinners to it, authorizes and confirms it; and nothing dignifies and sets it off but the adorable name of JESUS or SAVIOUR. By this first effusion of his blood, he exercises the office of a Saviour at the same time that he takes the name. How adorable are these first-fruits of his pains! Let this holy name be ever my refuge and confidence, my strength and support, my peace and consolation; and let it be truly to me a name of salvation! Exert upon my heart, O Jesus, the right and sovereign power which it gives thee to save me!

22. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present *him* to the Lord; 23. (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

Jesus submits to the law, to redeem those who were oppressed with it. His public oblation in the temple is the sign, and, as it were, the sacrament of his internal and perpetual oblation begun at the moment of his incarnation in his Father's sight, upon the altar of his own heart. Would to God that parents would present their children to the Lord with a piety, intention, and religion, pure and disengaged from the earth, in imitation of the blessed Virgin. She willingly partakes with her Son in the humiliation of a ceremony which, as to him, seemed to dishonour his divinity and the holiness of his birth; and as to her, her divine maternity and the purity of her bringing forth. These reasons would have been sufficient to induce others to excuse themselves from it.

24. And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Jesus is redeemed, not that he may dispense with his being consecrated to God and serving in his temple, but that he may accomplish a more perfect consecration, and be himself

the priest and the victim of God, the temple and the altar of his sacrifice on the cross. All Christians, once redeemed by Jesus Christ, are under the happy necessity of being unable to purchase a dispensation from their consecration. This was affected by their baptism, wherein their hearts were anointed and consecrated by the Holy Ghost. Wo to them if they live not up to the holiness of their consecration, by imitating Christ their Head, in whom they are both priests and victims, to offer and consecrate their own hearts to God by his Spirit. Is it not a misfortune, for the eldest sons of the nobility to be, as it were, dedicated to the world by their birth, and scarce to have any liberty at all of redeeming and consecrating themselves to God? O Jesus, Redeemer of the world, and redeemed with so vile a price to be the victim of it, grant that I may redeem myself from its slavery, and be long entirely to God by thy grace!

SECT. IV.—THE SONG OF SIMEON.—ANNA, THE PROPHETESS.

25. And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

Simeon affords us an idea of a truly good man, full of religion and love to God, of an exact justice and sincere charity toward his neighbour, who lives on earth expecting only the life of heaven, and follows in all things the light and motions of the Spirit of God. All the difference between a good Jew and a good Christian consists in this: the one waited for the first coming of Christ in the weakness of mortal flesh, the other waits for his second coming in the majesty of immortal glory. Jesus Christ is, both in the one and the other, truly "the consolation of Israel," of the true Israelite who is not of this world.

26. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

How good is it to live in the fear of God, in the expectation of his Son, and under the guidance of his Spirit, since one receives from hence so much comfort even in this world! The elect of God never die without "seeing the Lord's

Christ" here below. For from whence arises their fidelity, but only from their seeing with invisible eyes Him who is invisible? One could not possess him by hope, if one did not see him by faith.

27. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

How many Christians go to church out of curiosity, custom, human respects, or interest! How few go thither by the impulses of the Holy Spirit! Happy the Christian who is sure of always finding Christ in the churches, and of receiving him there by the communion! But in order to find him there to our advantage, we must carry him thither in our hearts, and perform, with respect to him, whatever is enjoined by his law. Would to God we might never find him in his temple, except only to adore and serve him as Simeon did!

28. Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

Simeon, in taking Christ up in his arms, received a singular favour, but such as would have been of no advantage to him had he not borne him also in his heart. He is in this heart, he lives and operates in it, he renews it, and by the impression of his holy infancy he makes it the heart of a little child, he baptizes and confirms it, gives it the communion, feeds it invisibly, and anoints it with the unction of his Spirit, that so his holy person may finish his course and his sacrifice with a joy altogether heavenly, while he is pouring forth his heart in the praises and benedictions of his Saviour.

29. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

This song of Simeon is a pattern of thanksgiving after the communion. He who has Jesus Christ really living in his heart, longs after nothing but the life of the world to come, and endures this with patience. How could this holy old man have departed in peace, and been so soon separated from his Jesus so long desired, had not Jesus himself, by forming and imprinting himself in his heart at that very moment, taught him from thenceforward not to know Jesus Christ according to the flesh? There is a way of seeing and possessing

Christ, independent of the senses, which is not well known but by the saints, and has more consolation in it than that which is sensible. Happy Simeon, thus, as it were, to carry Christ with him into the place where the patriarchs resided, and to be the first messenger to publish the birth of a Saviour to the church of the elect, who lived only on this hope!

31. Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

Jesus Christ is offered to all, but received by few. No sooner is he born, but he causes it to be published to all nations that he is their Saviour; and this he does by the mouth of a Jew, which condemns beforehand the jealousy of his own people.

32. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Here is mercy toward the Gentiles, who never knew God; here is mercy toward the people of Israel, who abused this knowledge: but, O God, what difference, since the latter receive the light only to reject it! The very order of the words shows the preference of the former before the latter. Christ is the glory of his people by being descended from them, by preaching salvation to them preferably to all other people, and not calling others but only upon their refusal,—but then, through this refusal, he becomes their shame, their condemnation, and their ruin. Thus it is also in respect of such Christians as reject Jesus Christ by their works. Thou art our light, O Jesus! but we must have eyes to see, a heart to love, and feet to follow thee; and thou alone canst bestow them on us.

33. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

Christ will not by himself teach those every thing whom he loves most. He frequently puts souls, even of the first rank, under the instruction of others whose knowledge and holiness are much inferior. The truths which the saints already know, are always new to them; and they therein every day find some fresh occasion to adore God. A faith which is intent discovers still, from time to time, in the works of God, and more especially in Christ Jesus, some new footsteps of his greatness, love, and holiness, still something for which to admire

eternally the dispensations and inexhaustible riches of his Spirit.

34. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

Miserable is that person who, not leading a life conformable to Christ, whom he professed in his baptism, finds in him nothing but his own destruction. Jesus is the salvation of many; but, O adorable conduct! he must for this very end be exposed to the contradiction of sinners. Who will complain of being spoken against in the service of God, since he sees even the Son of God exposed to contradiction? And who has not sufficient cause of humiliation, in being himself instrumental in forming by his life this contradiction to Jesus Christ? Dreadful distinction! but I hope, Lord, that thou wilt be my resurrection and life, because thou hast vouchsafed me the grace to hope only in thee, and to accept, without contradiction, the maxims and ways of thy gospel.

35. (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also;) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

God generally mingles some bitterness with the greatest joy of the saints. The blessed Virgin received the impression of all her Son's sufferings. Thus God treats those whom he loves most. The gospel is the touchstone which discovers those who belong truly to God. The evangelical sword, which Christ came to bring, soon separates those who love the peace of the world from those who love only that of a good conscience. There is nothing more secret and concealed than self-love; but works betray it. Those who love God, part with all for his sake: but when a man prefers some sensual good before him, he makes it evidently appear that he loves that sensual good better than God.

36. ¶ And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37. And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. 38. And she coming in

that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in* Jerusalem. [*Fr.* The redemption of Israel.]

Anna is a pattern of the continence and life of a true Christian widow. Her portion is constancy in the exercise of religion, mortification, prayer, and the offices of charity. The Holy Ghost does not vouchsafe so much as to speak here of the great persons of the earth; but he writes the life and eulogy of a poor widow, to preserve her memory to the end of the world, and to show how grateful to him this kind of life is. Happy that widow who "looks for the redemption of Israel," and lives on the hope of finding, at the end of her days, the expected Saviour in the true temple, in the heavenly Jerusalem, in the blessed eternity! Here is an emblem of it: God gathers round the body of his Sacrifice all these eagles, who hungered very much after it, and lived only on the expectation of being filled therewith. Let us desire it, and we shall find it.

39. ¶ And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

Christ being manifested to a smaller number of his elect, retires and hides himself for thirty years, leading an obscure life in a place out of which it was not believed that any good thing could come. He chooses his own country, and the place of his acquaintance, for the scene of an humble, poor, and laborious life, waiting for his Father's command to manifest himself to the world, to exercise his office of Saviour by his miracles, to establish his kingdom by his preaching, and to accomplish his sacrifice by his death.

40. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.

Christ chose to grow in his natural body, to teach us that he intends to grow in the members of his mystical body, with an increase of grace and holiness to a perfect age. All the treasures of the divine wisdom and knowledge were in Christ from the very moment of his incarnation; but they are unfolded and produced abroad only by measure and by degrees, according to the orders and designs of his Father.

SECT. V.—THE CHILD JESUS IN THE MIDST OF THE DOCTORS.

41. ¶ Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

It is here expressly said, that they went thither every year, but it is not said that they went oftener: to induce us, on the one hand, to be faithful in the discharge of those duties to which we are obliged; and, on the other, not to run, either through restless zeal or idleness, after all manner of popular devotions—retirement and application to our domestic duties being more profitable and more pleasing to God. Christ is brought thither regularly by his parents from his infancy, on purpose to teach parents to carry their children to church, and to watch over them as to religious duties.

42. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

Jesus celebrated yearly by anticipation the solemnity of the true passover, taking occasion by the law to go and offer himself as in sacrifice to his Father, and to prepare himself to fulfil all these types and figures by his death and resurrection. Every Sunday is the solemnity of the passover of Christians, which they ought to celebrate in their parish churches—their Jerusalem.

43. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not *of it*.

Christ sometimes hides himself from the most pious souls, to exercise their faith, and to increase their love and desires toward him. If our Lord, in the time of his greatest subjection, had not done some actions of independence, the belief of his divinity would perhaps have been less lively on that account. He quits not one dependence, but only by reason of another more holy and indispensable, in respect of his Father. We must imitate him, by never withdrawing ourselves from dependence, without the command of God.

44. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among *their* kinsfolk and acquaintance.

Let us be faithful in seeking Christ with an ardent and

indefatigable care in the day of this life, and by the light of faith. He is very rarely to be found among the kindred and friends of the world. God permits men sometimes to seek him with a good intention, but, not sufficiently enlightened, where they ought not, to the end they may be the more persuaded that they cannot seek him successfully but by his own light and grace.

45. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

We must not be discouraged when, even in all appearance, Christ seems unwilling to be found by us; but we must persevere in our search. It is in the church alone that we ought to seek him; it is there we may infallibly find him. Whoever seeks him elsewhere, wearies himself in vain: he will by no means find him out of Jerusalem, out of the only temple of God.

46. And it came to pass, that after three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

This absence of Christ for three days was a figure of those three days in which his disciples bewailed his death and believed him lost. His manifestation in the temple is an emblem of the lustre of his resurrection. It is in the house of prayer that a man finds Christ after having lost him. The humility of Jesus, in hearing those whose master he was, was the finest spectacle, the most useful lesson, the most edifying example, and the most holy sacrifice which had been ever seen in the temple to that time.

47. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

This manifestation of the divine wisdom in childhood served to awaken the faith of those who expected the promised consolation. Those who knew not the Son of God, had reason to admire his wisdom; but we who know him should rather admire that he so long suppressed, and, as it were, annihilated it for our sake; and should learn, for his, to restrain our own forwardness to show ourselves on all occasions.

48. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

The holy rigour with which Christ treats those whom he loves, leaving them often under trouble and affliction, is a mystery which self-love understands not. There is no grief equal to that of a soul which loves God, and thinks it has lost him. It must cost abundance of tears to find Christ again, being once lost. Joseph is called, even by the blessed Virgin, the father of Jesus: not as being such like others, but because he was so by representation, by alliance, being his mother's husband, head of his family, foster-father of his flesh, tutor of his childhood, guardian of his life, etc.

49. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

The first known words of Jesus Christ, priest, victim, and teacher, spoken in the temple, and in the midst of the doctors, are words of consecration, sacrifice, self-denial, zeal, and light. Let them teach us to do the work of God without consulting with flesh and blood. This is a lesson of self-denial, as well for the parents of the ministers of God as for the ministers themselves. To busy these in secular employments and temporal affairs, is to forget that it is only for those of heaven that they are ecclesiastics.

50. And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

A man ought to be reserved in speaking to his parents concerning that which belongs to the ecclesiastical ministry, after the example of our blessed Lord in respect of the holiest of parents. It is modesty and humility in parents not to be too curious to know it, in imitation of the holy Virgin and Joseph. They knew not but that the time of his ministry and manifestation was already come: but they wait, with a respectful silence, for what he shall be pleased to discover of it to them.

51. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.
52. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

We know nothing of what Jesus did for eighteen or twenty

years, but only that he was subject to his parents, and that he increased in wisdom and favour, as well as in age. We know nothing likewise of the blessed Virgin, but only that she kept in her heart the words of her Son, even those which she did not understand. Let us remember to do the same things after their example. Jesus returns to his ordinary dependence as soon as his Father's orders permit him to do it. What an example is here for children! but, alas! unknown to the generality of them, through the fault of parents themselves. Did these but take care frequently to place Jesus Christ before their eyes, and make them study the example of his virtues, they themselves would first reap the fruit of it.

CHAPTER III.

SECT. I.—THE PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

1. Now, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,

The divine Author of the Scriptures neglects not the human advantages of a most exact chronological era of the foundation of Christ's kingdom. The history of his life is a mystery of faith, and a work altogether divine, concealed under human appearances. As the eternal Word, though incarnate by the operation of the Holy Ghost, seemed to be born in our flesh like other men, because he was to appear among the Jews for thirty years as a mere man, and until he had been acknowledged to be the Son of God: so the written word of God, though inspired by the Holy Ghost, seems to have been composed after a manner altogether human; because, being first designed for the Jews, who would never receive it as divine Scripture, it was to have all the appearance and characters of a human history of such things as had passed before their eyes, and which was sufficient to make them discover the Messias in the life and miracles of Christ, by comparing them

with the ancient prophecies. When the Christian church was once formed by preaching and miracles, the divine authority of the Gospels was then made manifest to Christians, the church being in a condition to settle her canon of Scripture, and to attest the authenticity thereof.

2. Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

It is a rule, not to forsake retirement in order to instruct others, except at the call of God; not to anticipate it; not to put it off. Happy is that person who has perfectly learned in retirement to be satisfied with God, and to live without the world, to the end that he may not know it but only in reference to God, and may have respect to him alone when he delivers his truths to it. How great is the difference, between a preacher formed gradually by the hand of God in retirement, fasting, and prayer, and those ordained in haste, who have no other school but the world, no other masters besides themselves, and no other preparation than human studies, interrupted by worldly conversations, diversions, play, good cheer, and the like.

3. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

Men ought to preach repentance more than any other thing whatever, it being the foundation of Christian piety. This is what the world does not at all love: but its wants, not its taste, must be consulted. We see abundance of persons do all they can to make themselves sick, and nothing in order to be cured. This is a folly which the love of life and health renders very rare in relation to the body; but nothing is more common in respect of the soul.

4. As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Repentance is preached in the wilderness because it is seldom hearkened to in the world, and because it is necessary for a man to leave it, at least for a time, or in spirit, and by a separation of heart, if he would perform a substantial repentance. This is the only way to return to God, and to pre-

vail with him to return to us. It is into the heart that he is to come; it is the heart chiefly which we must "prepare and make straight." And how can this be done but by the love of God, which alone can rectify that which the love of the world has made crooked and corrupt?

5. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth; 6. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

The internal preparation which Christ requires of us, to the end that we may beg it of him, consists in the humiliation of the heart, the meekness of charity, the rectitude of the intention, the uniformity of the life, the renouncing of our own wisdom and righteousness, and in an ardent desire and humble hope of his grace and Holy Spirit. To this must be joined the external works of repentance, in order to mortify the flesh, to humble the spirit, and to cut off all excess and superfluity in the conduct of our lives. It is in true penitents that the power of a Saviour and the truth of salvation are most evidently seen. Give me, Lord, this true repentance, which restores thee to sinners, and causes them to find in thee an almighty and divine Saviour.

SECT. II.—JOHN'S ADVICE TO THE PEOPLE, THE PUBLICANS, AND THE SOLDIERS.

7. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

An apostolical freedom is a thing which a preacher ought always to preserve, that he may not flatter sinners. It is his indispensable duty, in a prudent manner, to make them thoroughly sensible what they really are before God as sinners, let their rank and quality be ever so great before men. Those who have either sucked in heresy with their milk, or been corrupted by the ill example of their parents, or by a bad education, cannot enough admire how they have been able to quit a state of sin, and "to flee from the wrath" and judgment of God: this is a particular favour, which requires a particular acknowledgment.

8. Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance;

What does this therefore denote, which connects this verse with the foregoing, if not that repentance is utterly unworthy of God's mercy when it is not at all answerable either to the number and greatness of our sins, or to the strength of our inveterate habits, or to the wrath and judgment of God which we have deserved, or to the singularity of the grace which has, as it were, snatched us away from sin and the divine wrath, while so many others are consumed thereby?

— And begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones, to raise up children unto Abraham.

Let us work out our own salvation ourselves, without depending upon what others do for us. If we do not imitate our fathers, their holiness will condemn us, instead of being serviceable to us, at the tribunal of God. None but God can form his own worshippers, as none but he can make true penitents. Christ informs us, by this comparison, that repentance is a change, a transformation, and a new birth; and that so long as there is no appearance of new manners and a new life, there is no conversion nor true repentance.

9. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

There is not one moment to be lost in the business of salvation. Whoever loses one, hazards all. The patience of God, infinite and eternal in itself, has its bounds and end in respect of sinners. A man can abuse God's patience only in this life; but this life is in his hands, and perhaps his arm is even now lifted up to cut down this unprofitable tree. "Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit," without exception, without regard to age, knowledge, dignity, or the purple wherewith a man is perhaps covered,—all shall be "cut down and cast into the fire," if they have not good works at the hour of death: and there can be none without charity, which is the root of them.

10. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

The first step of a true penitent is to resign himself up to the conduct of an enlightened, prudent, and disinterested

director. There is no plainer indication that a sinner's heart is really touched by God, and that the time of mercy is come, than his appearing docile, submissive, and ready to do every thing toward his own recovery. A sinner must receive the law, and not give it. It is an intolerable subversion of order, for a criminal to say to his judge, "What will you do?" But something like this is too often seen in the business of repentance, and we there find very few who say as they ought, "What must I do?"

11. He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

One part of repentance, which here includes the other works of mercy, is to give that which is superfluous to the poor. John does not enjoin the sacrifices of the law, knowing their insufficiency, but the sacrifice of charity, which covers the multitude of sins. The love of God is comprehended under that of our neighbour, whom we ought to love and assist only for the sake of God. Let us love to feed and clothe the poor. These works of charity are preferable to all others, as being the most necessary and indispensable. He who is not moved with his brother's misery, deserves to find God unmoved with his own.

12. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13. And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

John here gives rules for public receivers, as to what concerns their particular employment. He teaches perfectly to distinguish the abuses of any state or condition of life from the condition itself. A wise preacher should be so far from disturbing either the peace of private consciences or the public repose, by condemning necessary employments, that he ought carefully to promote both, by contenting himself with only retrenching the disorders and injustice of those who exercise them. To be exact in not permitting any abuses in employments of this nature, is to serve the state; and those loose casuists who allow and authorize them are pernicious to governments, by rendering these employments odious to the

people, by favouring their murmurings, by encouraging acts of injustice, and thereby giving occasion to rebellion and revolt.

14. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages.

John here, in the last place, regulates the duties of military persons, and shows that no condition is excluded from salvation. The business of war is not in itself at all opposite thereto; since there have been not only Christian soldiers, but even great saints and generous martyrs of that profession. If all war was contrary to the gospel, John would not have allowed those who presented themselves before him to continue in that state: however, it is certainly full of obstacles to salvation, which very few surmount. A state which is generally embraced either out of passion or libertinism, or through a blind destination of birth, the exercises whereof are so violent and tumultuous, agrees but little with the exercises of Christianity or the spirit of the gospel, which is all peace, charity, and meekness. It is, notwithstanding, just and necessary that there should be men to defend the state; but it is still more just and necessary that this should not be done at the expense of salvation. The grace of God can do every thing: this is what ought to comfort those who intend to serve Him in serving their king and country.

SECT. III.—JOHN'S TESTIMONY OF CHRIST.—HIS IMPRISONMENT.

15. ¶ And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not;

It was the design of God, in sending John, to fix the minds of the Jews upon the Messiah, and induce them to examine the Scriptures. The mortified life of a person devoted to religion, the edifying example of a holy priest, and the regular conduct of a faithful Christian, excite men to think of God, and awaken sinners quite asleep and senseless as to the business of salvation.

16. John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

There is more difference between the baptism of John and that of Christ than there is between water and fire. Nothing but the Spirit of God can wash the soul from all its impurities, and consume all its filth. Every thing is little before Jesus Christ, and the greatest saints are not worthy to be at his feet. Where, then, ought a great sinner to cast himself? and how could he dare present himself before him in prayer, had not he himself pressed him to come to him, and to hope every thing from him? He did not himself in person baptize the Jews, to whom John makes this promise; but it is He who baptizes both all Jews and Gentiles who are baptized, because it is his baptism which is given by his ministers, because it is in his name, by his authority, through his merits, by his invisible hand and Spirit, that every sinner is baptized, every heart is purified, that all sins are remitted, and every Christian is consecrated to God.

17. Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. 18. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

In the church, the good and bad shall be mingled together till the last judgment: we must, in imitation of the patience of God, preserve peace and charity with all the world till that time. Every age passes away in this kind of separation of the chaff from the wheat; but the visible and universal separation shall not be till the end of all ages. John joins the separation made by the word of Christ, received or rejected, practised or contemned, with the final separation: because that the one depends on the other; and because that, perhaps, as to most of those who heard him, there would be but a few days' distance, or less, between them. Let us strive, while there is yet time, to avoid the miserable portion of the chaff.

19. But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,

A preacher cannot hold his peace in the midst of public

crimes. John spared none in Herod, because he loved none of the good things, nor feared any of the evils which he could confer or inflict upon him. Some persons would not have wanted fair pretences to persuade John to dissemble. He was not charged with Herod's conduct: he ought to have cultivated his good-will, that he might be supported in the exercise of his ministry; he ran the risk of frustrating all his plans, and destroying the fruit of all his preaching, by making him his enemy; he exposed his disciples and his whole school to danger, etc. John did not reason after this manner: he did what God required of him at that time, and left the future to him who is the disposer of it.

20. Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

"See what John has drawn upon himself by his imprudence!" would the worldly-wise say; but the reflection of the wise according to Christ will be, "See the worthy reward of his faithfulness in discharging his ministry, and of his holy freedom!" for the grace of martyrdom is the greatest in the Christian religion. Impurity which is public and scandalous hardens the heart, and disposes a man to contemn and despise those who have a right to reprove him on God's part. It is very easy to pass from contempt to hatred, and from hatred to murder, or to such cruel usage as is almost equivalent to it.

SECT. IV.—THE BAPTISM AND GENEALOGY OF CHRIST.

21. Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,

Jesus is not ashamed to be found among the crowd of sinners, nor to take upon him the mark and remedy of sin. Let us from hence learn how careful we ought to be not to judge rashly. That which is done visibly in the baptism of Christ, is done invisibly in that of his members. Heaven is therein opened, but it is by the prayer of the church, whereof its Head sets it the example. There is reason to believe that in this action Christ said to his Father, that, according to his will, he took upon himself the sins of the world, in order to undergo the penance [or rather the

penalty] due to them, and to be the victim for them. Let us learn from him to join prayer with all the ceremonies of the church.

22. And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

The Father sets off and honours the humiliation of his Son, by the testimony which he gives of his divine extraction and of the fulness of the Holy Spirit in him. Jesus alone is the delight of his Father; of whom then ought he not to be so? The Holy Spirit is for none but the children of God: we have no right to it, because it is the Spirit of our Father. The fulness of it is given to the Head for all the members; and it is only under this quality that we must beg of him any portion thereof.

23. ¶ And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was *the son* of Heli,

Jesus, in submitting to the law or custom, and not exercising his public ministry till at the age prescribed by them, condemns the forwardness and precipitation of many ecclesiastics. Who had more right than the Son of God to exempt himself from the ordinary rules? Whose ministry is as useful to the church, as his was necessary? He, who came on purpose to make known his Father, concealed himself for thirty years. But even the time of his silence and obscurity made part of his ministry. Thus he taught us the necessity of silence, labour, retirement, and humility, and merited for us the grace of them. What a treasure is this of the hidden life of Christ! what a source of blessings! But it is only for the little ones and the humble. This is the greatest of all his mysteries, at least as to the duration of it; and yet very few honour and acknowledge it. A man may deceive himself in thinking that he imitates his zeal and public labours. Even pride may imitate charity in performing eminent actions; but there is nothing but humility which can love that humility and obscurity which Christ loved so much. The lesson of humility and silence must needs be of the greatest importance, since to this Christ dedicated thirty

years of his life and example, and reserved but three or four for all the other truths of the gospel.

24. Which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi, which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Janna, which was *the son* of Joseph, 25. Which was *the son* of Mattathias, which was *the son* of Amos, which was *the son* of Naum, which was *the son* of Esli, which was *the son* of Nagge, 26. Which was *the son* of Maath, which was *the son* of Mattathias, which was *the son* of Semei, which was *the son* of Joseph, which was *the son* of Judah, 27. Which was *the son* of Joanna, which was *the son* of Rhesa, which was *the son* of Zorobabel, which was *the son* of Salathiel, which was *the son* of Neri, 28. Which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Addi, which was *the son* of Cosam, which was *the son* of Elmodam, which was *the son* of Er, 29. Which was *the son* of Jose, which was *the son* of Eliezer, which was *the son* of Jorim, which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi, 30. Which was *the son* of Simeon, which was *the son* of Judah, which was *the son* of Joseph, which was *the son* of Jonan, which was *the son* of Eliakim, 31. Which was *the son* of Melea, which was *the son* of Menan, which was *the son* of Mattatha, which was *the son* of Nathan, which was *the son* of David, 32. Which was *the son* of Jesse, which was *the son* of Obed, which was *the son* of Booz, which was *the son* of Salmon, which was *the son* of Naasson, 33. Which was *the son* of Aminadab, which was *the son* of Aram, which was *the son* of Esrom, which was *the son* of Phares, which was *the son* of Judah, 34. Which was *the son* of Jacob, which was *the son* of Isaac, which was *the son* of Abraham, which was *the son* of Thara, which was *the son* of Nachor, 35. Which was *the son* of Saruch, which was *the son* of Ragua, which was *the son* of Phalec, which was *the son* of Heber, which was *the son* of Sala, 36. Which was *the son* of Cainan, which was *the son* of Arphaxad, which was *the son* of Sem, which was *the son* of Noah, which was *the son* of Lamech, 37. Which was *the son* of Mathusala, which was *the son* of Enoch, which was *the son* of Jared, which was *the son* of Maleleel, which was *the son* of Cainan, 38. Which was *the son* of Enos, which was *the son* of Seth, which was *the son* of Adam, which was *the son* of God.

Jesus, the principle of the new creation, and the repairer of the world, disdains not to be reckoned among ordinary creatures and among the children of sinful Adam. He designed hereby to secure us from having the least doubt that he was the man; and to assure us that we have a Victim, a Saviour, and a High Priest, capable of compassionating our infirmities and miseries.

CHAPTER IV.

SECT. I.—THE RETIREMENT, FASTING, AND TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.

1. And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,

What ought they to do who come from receiving the sacrament, and from being filled with the Spirit of God, but to hide their treasure in retirement, and secure it from the corrupt air of the world? There is a mutual assistance between the Spirit and retirement: for the Spirit of God received into the heart inspires the love of retirement, and retirement preserves the Spirit of God. Happy those whom the Spirit leads thither for life, and who shut the gate of their heart against those deceitful notions of false good which the conversation of men continually renews! Happy at least those whom it leads thither from time to time, in order to purify their hearts from that corruption which daily and hourly slides into them!

2. Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.

The first Adam, being proud, sinned, and was overcome by gluttony in a delicious garden: Jesus Christ, the second Adam, humbled and abased, does penance, and triumphs by fasting in a frightful desert. Fasting is, in some sense, a remedy for present temptations, and a preservative against future. Jesus Christ spared not his innocent flesh; and the sinner cherishes his continually, refusing it nothing, and studying still to pamper it, as if this were the sole end of his being in the world. The temptation of Christ is a source of grace and strength for those who are tempted. By voluntarily submitting to the temptation of the devil, he teaches us that the sinner is necessarily exposed to it all the days of his life. Libertines will by no means be persuaded that the devil intermeddles with their affairs; and even this illusion

itself is a proof of the empire which he has over them. Men are never more dangerously tempted, than when they think themselves secure from being so.

3. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.

God hears not the prayers of those who tempt him through a spirit of curiosity, neither does he make himself known to such. Let us learn never to give ear to the wicked spirit, even though he should not require of us any thing which is evil. He seems sometimes to inspire such designs as tend only to the glory of God, and to the manifestation of Jesus Christ and his divinity; but his aim is to gain our confidence, to grow familiar with us, and to deceive us by false appearances of good. God is he to whom we must hearken; and Jesus Christ must be our Guide and Instructor.

4. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

Jesus teaches us to encounter temptation—(1.) With the arms of God's word, which is likewise the support of the soul. (2.) By cleaving to him alone. (3.) By humbly adoring him. (4.) By declining all extraordinary ways. Temporal want and necessity is one of those opportunities which the devil takes care to improve, in order to tempt us; but it ought never to induce us to hearken to his voice. We have a Father, who has enjoined us to beg of him our bread every day: he will certainly give us either that, or something better. It is a peace of infidelity to confine God to one means alone, since he has in his hands more than we can possibly imagine.

5. And the devil, taking him up into a high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

A victory over one temptation ought not to make us negligent, because the devil is continually raising up new ones. Adam resigned himself up to the power of the devil by his sin. Christ bears the punishment of it, and delivers him from it. His goodness is so great, that he suffers himself to be taken up by the devil, to the end that he may not abandon those to him who deserve most to be delivered up to his

power, who call upon him, who give themselves to him, and who either consent or wish that he may carry them away. Such are lunatics, incapable of making any contract, much less of contracting with the devil, (who is under an interdict by the authority of the supreme justice,) and concerning that whereof they have no power to dispose; since all mankind belong to Christ, through the price of his blood.

6. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will, I give it.

These words of the devil contain three insolent lies, together with blasphemies against the sovereignty, justice, and providence of God. Would to God the devil had not among men imitators, pretending to be all-powerful, absolute masters, and sovereign arbitrators of all things! It is a dreadful judgment, when God does not humble them on earth as he did Nebuchadnezzar, but reserves them to be humbled with him whose pride they imitate.

7. If thou wilt therefore worship me, all shall be thine

The diabolical inclination to cause themselves to be worshipped, is, in some measure, in all the proud, and is a stronger temptation than that of carnal pleasures. Herod, to satisfy his passion, hazarded, by his foolish promise, no more than the half of his kingdom; but there are those who, like the devil, would give all they have to be worshipped. What can be said of those women, who join in themselves all the lasciviousness whereof the flesh is capable, and all the pride of the unclean spirit, but only that such are monsters more to be dreaded than the devil himself?

8. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

One only God, one only religion. O my God, how little do we understand what it is to worship thee only! Men worship every thing which they love, every thing wherein they place their happiness; and the number of those who love none but thee, and who place their happiness in thee alone, is less than can be imagined.

9. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence:

How many are there who come to the church, and are raised to the highest stations in it, only by the instigation of the devil, and in order to a more dismal fall! All advancement which comes not from God cannot but be very dangerous. When God raises any one, he is, as it were, engaged by his goodness to support him, to prevent his fall, or to lift him up again: when the devil, that is, ambition, pride, or vanity, does it, the person so raised finds no strength but in his presumption, no vigilance but in his blindness, no help but in his own weakness. Lord, let me rather crawl on the earth, like a vile worm, than be abandoned to this diabolical elevation.

10. For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: 11. And in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

The providence of God, in relation to his Son, to his church, and to all mankind, is a gronnd of confidence, but not of presumption. God is of himself sufficient to watch over us, and to defend us; and it is not through any necessity that he employs his angels on this account, but only to honour them, by rendering them the ministers of his providence, and causing them to co-operate with his designs concerning his Christ, his church, and his elect; to oblige them to enter into the mission, the ways, the charity, and the humility of his Son; to make known his love and fatherly care toward his elect; and to make them sensible how intent the apostate angels are on their destruction, and how all creatures are rendered subservient to the design of man's salvation, and that every thing is united in the church whereof Jesus Christ is the head. A guardian angel is a guide for the way, not for a precipice; a help in our necessities, not in our passions; and a master to enlighten us, not to follow our blindness.

12. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

One manner of tempting God, is unnecessarily to expose ourselves to danger, through a false confidence in his assistance. It is part of the respect and obedience which we owe

him, not to leave the common and ordinary way without his order. It is an extreme instance of ingratitude, to desire, by extraordinary effects and ways, to experience a goodness, wisdom, power, and providence, which so evidently show themselves every moment, a thousand and a thousand different ways, which are so much the more to be admired as they are more common and ordinary.

13. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

The devil ceases to tempt us only for a season, in order to lull us asleep: it is therefore a great folly not to watch continually. He assaults with open force those whom he has not been able to overcome by his stratagems, or by the allurements of the world. Thus he acted with respect to our blessed Lord in the latter part of his life, and with respect to holy hermits after one manner, and to holy prelates after another. Let us learn, both from the Head and from the members, that we are not capable of overcoming the persecutions and outward assaults of the devil, if we have suffered ourselves to be overcome by the charms and allurements of the world and of sin.

SECT. II.—CHRIST PREACHES IN GALILEE, AND AT NAZARETH. —ISAIAH'S PROPHECY.

14.¶ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and their went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

Who is there, after the example of Christ, so faithful as not to take one step but by the direction of God's Spirit. When a man, in entering into a state which is exposed to the temptation of applause, neither consults the Spirit nor follows its motions, such a one, after having overcome the temptations of the world and of riches, miserably yields to that of vanity, and is lost with the fruit of his victories. When the fame of an evangelical labourer is gone abroad in the world, wo be to him if he goes abroad with it, and follows it, instead of retiring within his own heart, and recollecting himself there with Jesus Christ.

15. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

After having been filled with the Holy Ghost, after having

fasted, prayed, and overcome vanity and all other temptations, a man may then begin with some confidence to instruct others, if God call him thereto. To be honoured by all, and yet to preserve humility, is a virtue to be found only among Christians, and which is very rare even among the most perfect. Whoever has not laboured beforehand in retirement, and by prayer, to mortify his mind and body, runs the risk of being carried away by the wind of vanity.

16.¶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

The constancy of Christ in performing the common duties of religion, at the congregations of the faithful and at public prayers, appears everywhere. The synagogue was to him the place of assembling, as the parish church is to us, and he was always very far from forsaking it.

17. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

Jesus Christ exercises the office of reader out of respect to the word of his Father, in order to render the use of it profitable to the people, to add authority to the prophecies, and to lay before the eyes of the Jews such as were most capable of opening them to see the coming of the Messias whom they expected. It was the consolation of the Jewish church and people to feed on the word of God, to contemplate Christ in the enigmatic representation which his Spirit had given of him, and to render the prophecies which promised him familiar to their minds. How much more joy, delight, and profit ought we Christians then to find in reading the New Testament, in the history of our blessed Saviour's life and mysteries fully accomplished, and in meditating on his virtues, his precepts, and the ways he has there traced out to us.

18. The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted,

The truth of these words of Isaiah (who was the evangelical prophet of Christ, and had so long before received a portion of his Spirit, to foretell and make him known as the true

Deliverer) was evidently fulfilled in this divine Saviour, in whom unchangeably resides the fulness of the Holy Spirit, in which his unction and sacerdotal consecration does consist, which began in the incarnation, wherein the human nature (personally united to the Word by the power of the Father and the co-operation of the Holy Ghost) was anointed with the Divinity itself, and thereby consecrated to an eternal priesthood. All the functions of this new Prophet, with regard to men, are exercised on the heart; and the grace by which he operates therein is a grace of healing, deliverance, and illumination; which, by an admirable virtue, causes them to pass from sickness to health, from slavery to liberty, from darkness to light, and from the lowest degree of misery to the supreme and eternal happiness.

—To preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

The whole series of ages, from the preaching of Christ even to his second coming, is but as it were one year, some few days or hours whereof are allowed us to prepare ourselves for the judgment of God. These are moments of mercy, hours of grace, days of salvation, and the year of the true jubilee or of remission of sin. Let us not suffer them to slide away from us: the time of wrath will soon follow, wherein our works alone must answer for us.

20. And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

Let us accustom ourselves to have our mind and heart fastened or fixed on Jesus Christ, that we may receive with profit his word and inspirations. If his reputation, his mien, and his modesty rendered the Jews so attentive to his words, and so intent on his person, what impression ought we to feel, after all we know of him, and all we have received from him!

21. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

Jesus Christ is the accomplishment of all the prophecies, types, and promises. This he declares himself, to make

known his mission, and to authorize it by the Scriptures, after having already done it by miracles and by the testimony of John. This truth manifests itself everywhere, that an extraordinary mission ought to be rejected if it be not proved by miracles, which are the voice of God.

SECT. III.—NO PROPHET ACCEPTED IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.—THE PEOPLE OF NAZARETH ENDEAVOUR TO CAST CHRIST DOWN HEADLONG.

22. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? 23. And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.

The words of Jesus Christ are all grace and spiritual unction to those who read or hear them with faith. Infidelity itself does not always hinder men from perceiving that they are the words of Almighty God. It is not from worldly friends or relations that we must expect the approbation of any thing which we do for the sake of God. Christ would be everywhere, and in all his conditions, an object of faith: in his birth, in his preaching, and in his death. The poverty of his life and of his parents is an occasion of offence to the proud, as well as his manger and his cross. Whoever once thoroughly comprehends that the way of Jesus Christ is a way of humility, will not be in the least surprised to meet with it everywhere, and would rather wonder to find it wanting on any occasion. He who measures truth by the extraordinary figure, the talents, or the nobility of those who preach it, is in great danger of embracing error and rejecting truth.

24. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.

The pride of man is very frequently deceived: he would fain make a figure where he is most known, and that is the very place where he generally loses the credit he has obtained. A priest, a preacher of the gospel, ought to be a Melchisedec, of whom we should know nothing but only that he is a minister of Christ, who worthily preaches his truth,

and is the first to put it in practice. These people could not reproach Christ with any other defect but the poverty of his kindred; and yet they despised him, notwithstanding his reputation and miracles. What fruit, then, can those persons hope for, whose faults are very evident in great numbers, and whose life is too much known, and altogether contrary to what they preach? If Jesus Christ does so little good among his friends and acquaintance, who is that priest who, being fond of his relations, can be very useful to them?

25. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; 26. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, *a city* of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow.

The more destitute a man is of human aid, the more ought he to trust to that providence which God is pleased to exert in extreme necessity. A woman whom her sex, poverty, widowhood, and foreign country rendered contemptible to the eyes of the flesh, is she whom God chooses preferably to all others; because she was rich in faith, and lived on this bread of the soul, whilst that of the body was wanting to her. How good is it to lay up a stock of provision of this invisible bread, which supplies the want of every thing. To depend upon this treasure for the future, is to depend upon the inexhaustible riches of our heavenly Father. This famine of three years and a half prefigures the famine of faith among the Jewish people during the public life of the Messias. Give me, Lord, some of this bread, on which every soul lives which lives for God. Let me learn to prefer the poor before the rich, seeing that in all ages thou makest choice of the former, to enrich them with the treasure of faith.

27. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

The choice of this stranger is a figure of the calling of the Gentiles to the baptism of Christ, as also of the small number of the elect. Few sinners are justified by baptism and repentance, if we consider well the number of those who die without having partaken of the one and without having profited by the other. By the examples of the widow and of

Naaman, both of them aliens, God plainly shows that the dispensation of his grace is altogether free, that it is due to none, and yet that no sort of persons whatsoever are excluded from it.

28. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

Truth provokes those whom it does not enlighten and convert. Of how great importance is it for men to bring along with them a good disposition toward the word of God and the truths of Christianity; otherwise they may hurt instead of profiting them! The proud man cannot bear to be told that God owes him nothing; and hereby he renders himself still more unworthy of his grace: he rises up against his Physician, instead of turning his anger against his pride, and desiring the cure of it. My God, how few are willing to acknowledge that the cause of their infidelity is in themselves, and that the source and principle of all grace lies in the mercy of God alone! The world is, even at this day, provoked whenever, after Christ's example, we endeavour to show it that the number of those who are saved is very small.

29. And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. 30. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way,

This action of the inhabitants of Nazareth is a dreadful instance of that dereliction with which those are often punished, who, instead of receiving the truth which is preached to them, persecute those who preach it. It renders those worse who oppose it. The sinner is incensed when he is reproached with his vices; and he himself justifies these reproaches by giving himself up to his passions. The wicked disposition of this people shows itself in the treatment which they give the most amiable of men; whereas the goodness and mortification of Christ appear in the choice he made of their city, to pass therein almost his whole life. These hearts, which an example so holy, and exposed so many years to their sight, could not touch, make it very evident that

nothing external can be of any advantage to us, unless internal grace causes us to make a good use of it.

SECT. IV.—JESUS PREACHES AT CAPERNAUM.—THE UNCLEAN DEVIL.—PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER.

31. And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days.

Christ teaches his first ministers not pertinaciously to continue preaching the truth to such as will not hear it, but to carry it to another place. He plainly shows that he does not seek his own satisfaction in the places whither he goes to preach; since, though Capernaum was so impenitent, that it will be more tolerable even for Sodom in the day of judgment than for it, yet he did not refuse to live there almost two years, to preach there continually, and to work there an indefinite number of miracles. Men are very far from following their own inclinations so little.

32. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.

The word of Jesus Christ, in his own mouth, is full of force and power: he imparts some of this power to those among his ministers who are entirely his. This city, which our blessed Lord chose for an extraordinary example of impenitence, shows that men may be struck with the truths of salvation, and admire the force of the preacher, without receiving any benefit at all from the sermon. Let preachers learn from hence not to lay any great stress on the applause, esteem, and admiration of men; for these often give them abundance of praises, and yet very few are profited by what they have delivered.

33. ¶ And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice,

He who has his soul possessed with uncleanness, is far more miserable than he whose body only is possessed with a devil. Were our faith as lively as our sense, it would be much more frightened at that innumerable company of persons, spiritually possessed, with which it daily meets, than we are when only one of the other kind is exposed to our sight. An

unchaste person appears, to the eyes of the mind, much more a demoniac than any other sinner. Our having so little abhorrence of such, is a sign that we are not yet in a capacity to judge well of the opposition which there is between the Spirit of God and the unclean spirit, between grace and sin.

34. Saying, Let *us* alone; what have we to do with thee, *thou* Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.

Whoever lives in criminal pleasures, cannot endure that any one should disturb his miserable peace. There are some who praise the saints, as the devil here does Jesus Christ, being forced by God's appointment to publish him as the Holy One, though, in all appearance, he did not know him to be the Son of God. God permits the wicked, in like manner, to preach truths which will only serve to their condemnation, as well as to that of the devil. My God, how great a difference is there between speaking of the holiness of God and Christ, and imitating it! A man may be a devil, and yet talk well concerning God; but it is the property of his children to form themselves by the holiness of their heavenly Father.

35. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.

A good man ought to reject the praises of scandalous persons, and not spare their vices for the sake of their flatteries. It is a terrible judgment on those who abuse the word of God in the pulpit, or elsewhere, to the corrupting the understanding or the heart, that he does not strike them dumb, as he did this devil. Their impunity serves only to heap up treasures of sin and wrath, and to harden their hearts the more. They have no power of doing hurt, any more than the devil, but only so far as God permits them.

36. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word *is* this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. 37. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about.

It is a very beneficial and Christian practice, frequently to invoke upon ourselves, and upon persons engaged in uncleanness, the authority and power which Jesus Christ has over the

unclean spirit. We have all of us a living fountain of uncleanness in concupiscence; and the devil makes greater use of it than we imagine, in order to tempt us. It is a very great occasion for fear and trembling, to perceive, by the means of bodily possession, how great the power is which the enemy of our salvation has over us; but it is a very great ground of confidence, to see, by the empire which Christ exercises over him, how powerful the Author of our salvation is. We do not make sufficient use of that portion of this authority and power which he has communicated to the church; and a sinner, or a just man tempted, would experience to his advantage how great it is, if he would, as one may say, exercise his heart in secret by the prayers of the church.

38. ¶ And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. 39. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.

Scarce has Peter begun to belong to Christ, but his family finds the good effects of it immediately, even as to bodily health: so advantageous is it to contract an acquaintance with good men. One single person, acceptable to God, draws down abundance of blessings on a whole family. It is by means of prayer that a man may be most serviceable to a family; and it is a great piece of infidelity not to employ it for the fever of sin, when it rages there, with as much earnestness as is used on the account of the fever of the body. Christ rebukes this so absolutely, on purpose to show us what power he has over that of the heart, to cure it. He stooped down over the sick person, to show that it was by his humiliations that he was pleased to merit this power; and to teach his ministers to humble themselves, and compassionate the infirmities of sinners, in order to heal them.

SECT. V.—THE DISEASED HEALED.—DEVILS CONFESS CHRIST.—HE RETIRES INTO A DESERT PLACE.

40. ¶ Now when the sun was setting,* all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. [* *Fr.* After the setting of the sun.]

That which Christ did by his bodily hands, in the diseases

of the body, he does every day in those of the soul by his invisible hand, which is his sovereign medicinal grace. It was not till after the setting of the sun, after the death of Christ, that the multitude of the nations was, by preaching, brought to him; that he healed them by the faith of his incarnation, and by the application of the merits of the mysteries accomplished in his flesh; and that imposition of hands in his name was used in the church.

41. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking *them* suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.

The testimony of the wicked is sometimes useful to good men, though they ought not to be pleased with hearing it. It was not from the father of lies, but from Jesus Christ himself, from the Scriptures, and from the church, that his people were to learn the mystery of the incarnation and coming of the Messias. The evil spirit is an enemy of salvation, with whom the people of God ought to have no commerce, and who is unworthy and incapable of preaching Jesus Christ.

42. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them.

Evangelical labourers ought, from time to time, to enter into retirement, after preaching and the other functions which respect their neighbour. It is good that a preacher should love to fly from the world. A commendable zeal, this, in the people of Capernaum, for Christ and his word; which shows, that as God has his own people in the midst of this world, though separated from it from all eternity, so in a city he has his faithful people, mixed with the unfaithful: a penitent Capernaum, which loves his word, which seeks, finds, and detains him with diligence and earnestness; and an impenitent and reprobate Capernaum, which, by its pride, exalts itself to heaven, and which, by the justice of God, shall be brought down to hell, and cast even lower than Sodom: a Capernaum chosen through mercy, and a Capernaum abandoned with justice.

43. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.

Those who do not sufficiently value the word of God, and neglect to hear it, because they have every day the opportunity of doing it, will perhaps one day know how desirable it is, when it shall be taken from them. Let us profit by the men of God, and by the truths which they preach to us; we often wish for them in vain, when God, for our punishment, withdraws them from us. It is neither the inclination of the people, nor that of the preacher, nor any prospect of great advantage, which ought to determine an evangelical labourer to one place rather than to another, but the mission, the known will of God, and the appointment of superiors.

44. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

Preaching being the proper function of Jesus Christ, and of bishops who represent him, we need not wonder that the Prince of pastors and Bishop of our souls is so intent upon it. His fidelity and constancy in propagating the gospel in cities and villages, is the condemnation of those who desert his flock and leave it without instruction.

CHAPTER V.

SECT. I.—THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES.—THE ADMIRATION AND CALLING OF PETER, ANDREW, JAMES, AND JOHN.

1. And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, 2. And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing *their* nets.

The haste and forwardness of people is often very deceitful and fruitless. We see them everywhere running in crowds after Christ; and yet almost the whole body of the Jewish people continued in incredulity. Let us distrust our desires and our fervours, so long as our works are not answerable to them. The confidence and affection which persons have toward any director of the conscience, how holy soever he be,

are much to be suspected when no fruit of them appears. The pastoral charge is a burdensome office to those who endeavour to perform all the duties of it; but the sovereign Pastor alleviates the weight of it by bearing it himself, both in his own person, and in those of his ministers who undertake it for his sake.

3. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

The true church is that which, by the purity of its faith, is like this bark loosed from the earth, which professes Jesus Christ, which is the school in which the chair of truth resides, whereon Christ continually sits, to teach, sanctify, govern, and comfort his people, and to co-operate with his ministers. By this thrusting out from the land, he teaches his ministers not to contract too great a familiarity with the world; to preserve their authority, and the respect of the people, by a life more retired and holy than that of the laity; to labour so as neither to be wanting in their duty, nor to overburden themselves; to secure themselves from the contagion of sinners and of sin; to retire from time to time, etc. He prays Peter, when he could as well command him; that he may, by his own example, as well as his words, condemn the spirit of domineering, and the haughty and imperious carriage of superior toward inferior ministers.

4. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

No man ought to cast the net of God's word but by his order, his mission. When Jesus Christ had left speaking to men, the church, spreading itself abroad into all nations, was, as it were, launched out into the deep by the apostles and their successors. It is this bark alone which carries Jesus Christ as far as the new world; to this is reserved the grace of converting all people; and it is by the nets belonging to it that souls are drawn into this bark.

5. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

This mysterious fishing represents that of souls. In vain

the preacher labours to convert them if God gives not his blessing. It is upon his grace that he must rely, and not upon his own eloquence and strength. The fishing of the night is an unsuccessful and unfortunate fishing,—without light, without mission, without Christ's assistance, in a bark where he is not, and without his direction. This is the fishing of heretics and schismatics, and of such as wait not for his command. The fishing of the day is a blessed fishing, which is carried on by the light of faith, in the sight of the Sun of Righteousness, with confidence in the promise of his assistance to the end of the world, and in the mid-day of truth. This is the fishing of the ministers of the church.

6. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

The weak ought to take great care not to be scandalized at seeing the nets of the church sometimes break. It is a misfortune which proceeds from the multitude. Heretics break the net of the church when they corrupt the word of God and the purity of the faith; schismatics, when they break her union; wicked ministers, when they despise her authority, setting up for workmen of their own accord, without union with their fellow-labourers, and without dependence on the order of the church; and, lastly, vicious Christians, when they violate her discipline, when they will not submit to her rules concerning the administration of the sacraments, when they corrupt the sanctity of her manners by a scandalous life, and by the breach of their baptismal vows.

7. And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

The apostolical charity is very far from choosing rather to leave souls to perish, than to have companions and fellow-labourers in serving them. It is an intolerable pride to think nothing well done but what we do ourselves, and a diabolical envy to be afraid lest others should do better than we. And is it not also a deplorable and schismatical ambition, from helps and assistants, to set up for masters and chiefs? The more the number of labourers has increased in the church,

the less choice and exactness has there been used in admitting them into it; and very many seemed to have entered for no other end but only to break the bonds of peace, and to overturn and sink its discipline.

8. When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

He who has a lively belief of the holiness of God and of Christ, can scarce suffer himself to remain in their presence. A pastor, truly humble, cannot conceive how God should make choice of him to serve him, though he knows very well that the glory of grace appears so much the more illustrious as its instruments are more weak and less proper for its work. We honour God by lifting ourselves up to him, and approaching him with confidence; we likewise honour him by abasing ourselves before him, and by removing, as it were, at a distance from him by humility.

9. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

How much more wonderful was the draught of souls which Peter took, after he had received the Holy Ghost! Great success astonishes a faithful minister, because he is in fear for his humility, without which he loses himself in saving others. The joy which we receive from hence should not hinder us from applying ourselves to admire the power of God in his works, and from making use of them to increase and heighten our idea of it, and our reverence for it.

10. And so *was* also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

If the bare figures of the all-powerful operation of grace in the heart of sinners, in order to draw them to God, be so surprising, how must it then be when we feel this operation itself in our own? They who continue still incredulous, after having seen all the world converted unto Christ, will be condemned by the example of these apostles, whom only one miraculous draught of fish transported with admiration.

11. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

The effect of miracles should be, to make us forsake every

thing which keeps us from serving God. Visible miracles cannot be of any advantage to men, unless God is pleased to work an invisible one, in order to cause them to make a good use of the other. The former are a voice which speaks to the senses; there must also be one which may speak to the heart. I ought to render thanks to thee, O Lord, for the miracles recorded here, since it was by means of these that thou first gavest us apostles, and drewest after thee the fathers of our faith.

SECT. II.—THE LEPER.—RETIREMENT AND PRAYER.

12. ¶ And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy; who seeing Jesus fell on *his* face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst me make me clean.

A prayer, humble and full of faith, is necessary in order to obtain the cure of the leprosy of sin. True faith speaks little, but sighs much. He who is sensible of his own unworthiness, is extremely willing to depend upon the pure bounty of God. The confusion of a sinner, at the sight of Him whom he has offended, hinders him from lifting up his eyes toward Him, and makes him hide his face in the dust; but trust and confidence causes him to pray. How universal soever the corruption of a heart, full of the leprosy of sin, may be, yet it cannot be incurable to him who is the universal Physician, the plenitude of holiness, and the Almighty. No, Lord, I will never despair, but of myself, and I will eternally hope in thee, notwithstanding the number of my sins and the deepness of my wounds.

13. And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.

When it is the will of God to save a soul, and he touches it powerfully with the internal hand of his grace, no human will resists him. That which he performs by himself on this leper, he does in all ages by the ministry of his church. It is the hand, indeed, of the priest which is stretched forth upon the humbled sinner, it is his voice which is heard; but it is the will and power of Christ which makes the sinner clean.

14. And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

Not to shun applause in performing good works, and chiefly in serving souls, is to expose our wealth and treasure to robbers. What blessing soever God is pleased to give to the extraordinary and subsidiary labourers of the church in the direction of souls, they ought to imitate Christ, in still inspiring them with a submission to ordinary pastors. We follow the appointment of God when we do nothing but with regard to them. Miracles are for the edification of some, and the condemnation of others. Nothing ever was more wise, more exact, more submissive to God and the church, and more peaceable with respect to men, than the conduct of Christ. They who will not imitate it, are not worthy to serve souls.

15. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. 16. ¶ And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

It is sometimes necessary, after the example of Christ, to prefer retirement and prayer to the exercise of charity, when the objects of it crowd upon us in too great numbers. It is for the advantage of souls, as well as of ministers, that these should be absent from those for a time. To speak to God in behalf of souls, is not to forsake them. It is the most effectual way of serving them, for a man to purify himself by retirement, that he may serve them the better, and to replenish himself with God and his truths, that so he may dispense them in greater abundance, and after a more holy manner. When a great reputation pursues us, we must fly from it as from a thief, either into the wilderness, if we can, or at least into the fortress of prayer and humility.

SECT. III.—THE PARALYTIC.

17. And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them.

Jesus is full of a beneficent and healing virtue: the only way to feel the effects of it, is to approach him by faith, and

to invoke him with the sighs of the heart. He does not perform his miracles only before the simple and ignorant; he exposes them to the sight of those who are best able to judge of them: this is not the manner of deceivers. These doctors having a perfect knowledge of the prophecies, God brings them hither to this end, that they may apply them to the miracles of Christ, and have every thing which is necessary in order to discover his mission, and to receive him as the Messias. I adore, O Saviour of the world, both the extent of thy charity and the foresight of thy wisdom, in respect of those who most abused them! They never returned thee any thanks for them; I praise and bless thee for them in their stead.

18. ¶ And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought *means* to bring him in, and to lay *him* before him.

The world is full of false friends, who flatter us in our evil inclinations, which are the bed of the sinner's fatal repose; but where can we find such as these, who will earnestly endeavour to obtain a cure for us? We place friendship and generosity in advancing a friend to offices, employments, or dignities, which is, in truth, very often only putting him into the way of damnation, or exposing him to the immediate occasions of offending God. True friendship consists in taking a friend out of the way of sin and perdition, in carrying him to Christ, in bringing him into His house, which is the church, and in laying him, as it were, before Him by admonitions, instructions, reading, reflections, prayers, etc.

19. And when they could not find by what *way* they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with *his* couch into the midst before Jesus.

God often grants to the faith, prayers, and charity of others, the conversion of a sinner who does not in the least think of God. Nothing seems impossible to charity. We ought to try all ways to approach Christ: we must place ourselves in his sight, and put ourselves into a condition of receiving his mercy. God very frequently permits great obstacles to conversion, on purpose to make it the more desired, to try the

faith of those who pray for it, to oblige them to use extraordinary endeavours, and to show them that it is only from God, through Jesus Christ, that they are to expect it.

20. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

In our prayers, Christ often hearkens more to our wants than our desires. He goes to the very root of the evil, which is sin; and we ought to imitate him in our afflictions. They who, out of a spirit of charity, pray for others, receive frequently more than they ask. God interprets their prayers; because he understands better what charity asks in them, than they do themselves.

21. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

The wicked change the best remedies into poison, and abuse the most sacred truths. There is none more full of consolation, than to learn that he who forgives sins has placed on earth the throne of his grace and mercy; and yet men set themselves against this truth, and to this end shut their eyes and ears against prophecies and miracles. Those who so violently oppose this doctrine, have the misfortune to succeed the Pharisees and other incredulous Jews in this error; but believers have the comfort of having this remedy always ready and always present.

22. But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

True charity is never provoked, nor discouraged in promoting the salvation of souls. He who knows the bottom of the heart, and clearly sees its most secret wounds, is the only physician who can heal them. This proof, so mild and charitable, opens not the eyes of these blind wretches, because they think themselves too clear-sighted; and because there is no kindness more incurable than that of envy.

23. Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

That which God does in relation to the life of the body, shows us plainly what his charity and power do as to the

eternal life of our souls. Jesus Christ does now no longer make use of external miracles to persuade men of this truth; but the faith which makes it believed, is an internal miracle which is wrought in the heart of all the faithful, and becomes sensible of their works.

24. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go unto thine house.

The mercy of Jesus Christ is as sovereign, and his grace as powerful over the soul, as his word is over the body. Whoever humbly resigns himself up to it, will never be deceived. Christ has upon earth, not only during his life, and in his own person, but also after his death, in his church, even unto the end of the world, the power to forgive all kinds of sin.

25. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

That which we have to do after conversion, is—(1.) To become docile and obedient to the word of God. (2.) Earnestly to endeavour to destroy and take away from before the eyes of the world the marks and remainders of our sins. (3.) To go into retirement as much as we can. (4.) To live in the spirit of acknowledgment. (5.) To have no longer any other thoughts or desires, but only of departing to our own house, to that celestial and eternal habitation prepared for us in our proper country. (6.) To pass the rest of our lives, until we are recalled home, in glorifying God, by directing all our actions to him, and doing nothing but what tends to his glory.

26. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.

The conversion of a soul generally surprises the world; but the church glorifies God for it, because it makes known his power. How much more does she glorify him for the cure of so many spiritual paralytics throughout the world, in whom the wonders of the divine grace so conspicuously shine forth? Did we but apply ourselves more to the consideration of God's conduct over souls, we should then experience in ourselves all the different affections which we read of here,—astonishment, fear, and admiration of the greatness

of God. If men feel all this in seeing God dispose absolutely of a sick body, incapable of resisting, how much more must they needs feel, in seeing him like a God dispose as he pleases of all hearts, even the most rebellious, without the least infringement of their liberty: which the more weak and diseased it is, resists him so much the more, and is healed only by ceasing to resist him?

SECT. IV.—THE CALLING OF MATTHEW.—THE WHOLE NEED NOT A PHYSICIAN.—THE PIECE OF NEW CLOTH.—OLD VESSELS.

27. ¶ And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.

See here the order of a sinner's salvation:—(1.) God's looking upon him denotes his predestination. (2.) His command, his vocation. (3.) St. Matthew's obedience shows his justification. (4.) His feast represents that of the eucharistic communion, and the heavenly banquet which makes his glorification. The looks of Christ are not unprofitable, and cast on men by chance; they have their cause in the eternal designs of the divine mercy. I have this confidence, O my God, that I am of the number of those upon whom thou hast, from all eternity, looked with that eye of grace and goodness which decrees salvation, determines the means, and regulates the whole economy of it. Thy present mercies are to me a pledge of thy eternal mercy.

28. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. 29. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.

There are four marks of a true conversion:—(1.) To rise up, by quitting the occasions of sin. (2.) To follow Jesus Christ, by doing good works. (3.) To be full of acknowledgment for the mercy of God. (4.) To draw others to Christ. A man is no longer of the world when he renounces its maxims, and makes no difficulty of declaring himself openly a disciple of Jesus Christ. The table of a rich publican is not very proper for the disciples of Christ, unless he carry them to it himself, and his Spirit be there with them.

30. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

Hypocrites and envious persons are always ready to murmur, and to censure the best things. Men often hide, under a false zeal for perfection, a real pride, which criticises upon every thing, is offended at every thing, and complains of every thing; and which naturally tends to make inferiors dissatisfied with their superiors. Christ ate with all sorts of persons; but never at court, nor with any of the priests, to inform us that there is very rarely any good to be done with such persons when once they are corrupted, and that we rather run the hazard of being corrupted by them ourselves.

31. And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

Jesus, the sovereign Physician of souls, generally heals none but those who own themselves sick. Miserable is that person who imagines he has no need of him. Here are words very comfortable for humble and patient sinners, but very dreadful for the proud. But it is this very pride itself which is our great disease. I do acknowledge it, O Lord; I lay it before thee, and humbly confess the extreme want which I have of thee. Every thing in me stands in need of a cure, O thou only Physician of my soul; and I glory in not being able to recover without thy assistance and remedies.

32. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Sin, then, is the true disease; righteousness is health; Jesus, the Physician; repentance, the remedy: and grace causes men to know, desire, and seek for health, to love and receive the remedy, and makes the remedy effectual. There are two sorts of calls to repentance: the one external by the word, which is common to all, and which of itself produces nothing; the other internal by grace, which is proper only to those who either desire it through a beginning and imperfect vocation, or make use of it through one which is perfect and consummate. Those who will not take the remedy of repentance are either such as are in a frenzy, who do not think themselves sick; or in despair, who think themselves past cure; or fools, who care not for health; or children, who know not the value

of it; or inconsiderate, who believe they can do well enough without remedies; or delicate and effeminate, who cannot bear the sharpness of them; or fantastical, who will not trust themselves to the most skilful physicians; or abandoned wretches, who have none.

33. ¶ And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise *the disciples* of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?

Hypocrites are always apt, (1.) To blame others. (2.) To extol their own actions. (3.) To esteem that most which appears to the eye of men. (4.) To glory in resembling those whose holiness is the most eminent. (5.) To pass their lives in comparing themselves with others, not in order to imitate those who do better, but to undervalue and decry them; nor yet to assist those who seem not do so well, but only to insult them. It is great wisdom to apply ourselves but little to the examination of what others do, for fear of meeting with a snare in their defects, or even in their very virtues. None but the humble can do it to their advantage, because they profit by every thing, continually taking occasion to humble themselves more and more.

34. And he said unto them, Can ye make the *children of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? 35. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. [* *Fr.* Friends of the bridegroom.]

The friends of the bridegroom, even when they do not fast, have the essential part of repentance, since they have love, without which repentance cannot be true, and with which a man cannot but hate sin. Jesus Christ exempts not his friends from the austerities of repentance, but prepares them for them. He begins with the heart which is most sick and feeble, and which must become most healthy and strong. After their internal renovation, which was completed on the day of Pentecost, the apostles led only a life of fasting, mortification, and prayer. It is now the time for our austerities to succeed, and to be united to the sufferings of Christ; for us to continue them in our life, and to bear his quickening mortification in our mortal flesh. Those who are the ministers of penance are not the masters of it; they ought to keep close to

the rules of the gospel and of the church, and not to extend that dispensation which Christ confirmed to the time of his presence on earth, to a time wherein he himself has declared that his disciples should fast.

36. And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was *taken* out of the new agreeth not with the old.

It is no less necessary thoroughly to understand the constitution of souls, in order to conduct them well, than it is to understand that of bodies, in order to manage them rightly and to cure them. A piece of new cloth is good, but not for an old garment or habit. The more excellent things are in themselves, the less proper are they for such as are imperfect, or but beginners. The more weak the sick person is, the less capable is he of strong remedies. In this consists the art of spiritual, as well as bodily physicians, to understand their patients thoroughly, to know all sorts of good remedies, and to give them properly and seasonably.

37. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. 38. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.

It is an essential part of good conduct, in relation to souls, to proportion the external part of piety to the internal, the work to the strength, the labour to the ability of every one. A man thinks it good husbandry to put his new wine into old vessels; and he thereby ruins himself. He thinks to advance a soul very fast by putting it immediately on that which is most perfect; and he, by so doing, sometimes sets it very far backward. The business is, not for a man to teach the soul under his direction whatever good he knows himself; but to feed it with truths in proportion to its wants, and according to the strength of its spiritual stomach, and to cause it to practise them according to the measure of its grace.

39. No man also having drunk old *wine* straightway desireth new; for he saith, The old is better.

As old habits are difficult to be overcome, great regard must be had to them at first. It is rashness in a spiritual director to undertake that which grace sometimes performs all

at once. Habits are ordinarily corrected only by other habits; and there must be time to form them, because, in order to obtain the grace of them, much prayer, labour, and meditation on God's law are necessary. If we do not earnestly beg the relish of Christian truths, and the love of the wholesome rigour of the gospel, the new law of Jesus Christ will always appear to us a paradox, and his new yoke an insupportable one.

CHAPTER VI.

SECT. I.—THE EARS OF CORN PLUCKED, AND THE WITHERED HAND CURED, ON THE SABBATH DAY.

1. And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing *them* in *their* hands.

Of the three Sabbath days accounted the most solemn, as falling in with the three great feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, the second of these three chief, or principal, was that of Pentecost. The rubbing of the ears of corn by the apostles, is a circumstance which informs us how far Christ and his disciples were from making better cheer on festivals than on other days, since they were at that time in want even of bread. How much does this condemn those Christians who distinguish holidays, and the times of the dedication of their churches, from common and ordinary days, by nothing but feastings and rejoicings altogether carnal!

2. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?

A false zeal for the law blinds men, and hinders them from understanding it rightly. See here false religion and false tenderness of conscience, whereby, under pretence of promoting the interest of God men satisfy their own malice and envy. The chief Sabbath is for a man to shut his heart against sin, to cause the works of pride to cease; in it to honour and imitate the love of God, who did every thing for man in the six days of the creation, and who makes even the rest of the seventh subservient to his ease and comfort.

3. And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was ahungered, and they which were with him;

The saints, even after their death, are beneficial to their neighbour by their example. Princes and persons in authority ought to act with great circumspection; because their example serves, as it were, instead of a law, either as to good or evil, and more as to the latter than the former. The bad examples of private men seldom make any impression but in their lifetime: that of kings is of fatal consequence in succeeding ages. Christ here teaches us to justify kings, and favourably to interpret their actions as often as we can, and to be very far from giving a bad construction and a malicious turn to them.

4. How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?

The Spirit of God and charity give to pious men a liberty which the world understands not. Charity has a right over the most holy things, to make them serviceable to men in their necessities, because it is the first of laws, and because that God, who is charity itself, freely yields to man the use and profit of his good things, provided he still pay him the homage and service due for them. The use which charity makes of holy things cannot profane their consecration, since it is charity which consecrates every thing to God. To preserve the life of a man, who is the creature and image of God, is to preserve a good which belongs to him.

5. And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

He who has bestowed on man the six first days, that he may therein provide for the necessities of this present life, and reserved to himself the seventh, has not taken from himself the power to dispose of this, as well as of the others, in favour of man. If every thing be allowed to man, even that which God seems to have reserved to himself, how much more just is it, that every thing should be returned to God by our acknowledgment and love?

6. And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was

withered. 7. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him.

Charity profits even by that which is evil; envy poisons the best things. Here are two very different spectacles: Jesus, always busy in instructing men, in doing them good, and in sanctifying the feasts by good works; and the scribes and Pharisees, always watchful to oppose the good he does, to seek an accusation against him, and to dishonour God the more on those very days which were dedicated to his honour. It is the heart which makes all the difference; it is in the regulation of this that we must employ our chief care, if we would not imitate the scribes and Pharisees.

8. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth.

What pleasure would a revengeful person take in being able to discover the criminal thoughts which his enemy hatches in his mind? But how very different an example does our divine Pattern give us on this occasion! Docility and obedience are the first dispositions of a sinner who desires to be cured. It is to the church, which has the ministry of spiritual healing, that we must be obedient; it is to her that we must discover our disease.

9. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy *it?*

Days dedicated to the worship of God, and to the commemoration of his benefits, cannot possibly be hallowed better than by performing all sorts of good works, and abstaining from all such as are evil. By a wise and charitable question Jesus confounds these obstinate sinners, without discovering the bad disposition of their hearts; how much rather ought we to conceal that of the weak, and to spare their reputation, modesty, and infirmity before men? Christ does not content himself with confounding his adversaries in secret, but he instructs them with humility, and edifies them.

10. And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

The envy of some enemies ought not to hinder us from

doing good. This steadfast and undaunted look of Christ teaches his ministers not to be at all terrified by the ill will of the adversaries of goodness and truth. Those whom fear renders weak and cowardly in the exercise of their ministry, forget that they exercise it in the name and place of Christ, and that they must give account to him of their unfaithfulness, and of the damage which the church shall have suffered thereby in her children.

11. And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.

It is not a thing so uncommon as we imagine, to see envy so furiously incensed against charity, and against such evident proofs of truth and innocence. Pride, obstinacy, and interest, combined together, are capable of any thing. When men have once framed their conscience according to their passions, madness passes for zeal, the blackest conspiracies for pious designs, and the most horrid attempts for heroic actions.

SECT. II.—CHRIST PRAYS, AND CALLS THE TWELVE APOSTLES.

12. ¶ And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

In every condition of life we have sufficient occasion to imitate that which Christ here does, who prepares himself for the functions of his priesthood, and for the performance of good works, by retirement, watchfulness, and prayer. Prayer, which Christ, and, after his example, his church, makes use of before choosing apostles, bishops, and other ministers, shows plainly that in this choice we must depend upon God. They are the officers of his household; and it is highly just and reasonable that he should be the Master of it, and that none should be placed therein but by his own hand. It is a visible encroachment upon his rights not to consult him at all in this choice; but it is no other than to mock him, for men to consult him when they either have determined within themselves, upon reasons altogether human, or are resolved to choose according to their own fancy.

13. And when it was day, he called *unto him* his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;

Jesus prays as man, but chooses as God, and as sovereign Priest in the name of God. He consults neither those he chooses, nor those from among whom he chooses them; but without any human respect whatever executes his Father's will. Mission is so essentially necessary to a man's having authority in the church, that Christ would have his first ministers bear the name of apostles or envoys, to the end their mission might be as well known as their very name, and that all the world might be convinced that there is no true mission in the church besides that which resides in their successors, which is communicated by them, and which, through them, runs back even to the apostles, and to Christ himself, by an uninterrupted succession.

14. Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew,

This change of Peter's name is a mark of distinction for him, and an important instruction for us. He who enters into the ecclesiastical ministry ought to be, as it were, changed into another man: no longer to know the world, nor to be known by it; to have, if possible, no human weakness, but the firmness of a stone or rock; to be no longer solicitous about his family, but entirely dedicated to the church; to be no more affected with human hopes or fears, but to be insensible to all false enjoyments, and always ready to be buried quick, like an apostolical stone, cast into the foundation, to support the fabric of the church.

15. Matthew and Thomas, James the *son* of Alpheus, and Simon called Zelotes, 16. And Judas *the brother* of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.

Who can glory in dignities, when he considers that the worst man in the world was advanced to the apostleship? That person strangely deceives himself who relies upon the marks of a lawful call to the priesthood, to benefices and dignities, without endeavouring to answer it by his life and ecclesiastical labours. Never was there a call more lawful or more canonical than that of Judas; never was there seen a more wicked minister. A foundation without a building is

useless; a building without a foundation is ruinous. An apostolical life, founded upon an apostolical call, is the glory of Jesus Christ, the edification of his church, the salvation of the minister, and the honour of the ministry.

17. ¶ And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; 18. And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed.

We see here a representation of the church sojourning on earth under the conduct of the pastors. All their functions are reduced to two, which are—to instruct by the ministry of the word, and to heal by the sacraments; and all the duties of the faithful come within the same compass, namely, to hear the word of God, and to use their utmost endeavours to be healed of their passions and their sins. Faith is not wanting to those who follow Christ and his ministers with so much zeal and fervour, nor prayer, among so many poor and miserable persons. The whole life of a Christian consists almost entirely in contemplating Christ in his gospel, in order to imitate him, and in praying to obtain the grace to do it. Christ and his apostles come down toward the people, in condescending to their weakness, in compassionating their infirmities, and in labouring to heal them of their diseases. Unhappy is that pastor who does not imitate them herein!

19. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed *them* all.

Christ is full of grace and holiness, that he may replenish souls therewith; and it is by prayer that we approach him, in order to receive of his fulness. Though, by his ascension, he be removed at a vast distance from the earth, and be also invisible in the holy sacrament, yet his virtue is neither less present, nor less active, powerful, and efficacious in the cure of our hearts. Let us admire how he never lets any opportunity pass of inspiring into us, by healing the body, a trust and confidence in his sovereign power as to the cure of our soul. Let us often by faith, as it were, touch Jesus Christ, now residing in heaven; let us often with faith approach Christ; and his virtue will heal us all.

SECT. III.—THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.—THE POOR BLESSED. —THE RICH CURSED.—FALSE PROPHETS.

20. ¶ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed *be ye* poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

The love of riches and the love of God are incompatible in one and the same heart. Happy, then, is he who is not rich in these false goods! in the want of which it is much easier for a man to live contented than not to set his affections upon them when he has them. What is it to set our affections upon these things but to make ourselves slaves to them, to be absolutely governed by them, and to have them for our king? And God cannot reign in a heart unless he reign there alone. Blessed is that man who, having his heart void of all care about riches, lives on the expectation of eternal wealth, possesses heaven already by hope, and secures the right he has in the kingdom of God and in God himself, as being his child and heir, by relinquishing all pretensions which he may have to earthly possessions as a child of Adam!

21. Blessed *are ye* that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.

There must be abundance of faith to carry apostolical poverty so far as even to want necessaries, and to suffer hunger. God permitted Paul to suffer it, while Nero, and other monsters like him, lived in the midst of plenty and delights. Let us by no means condemn his Providence, but adore the wisdom of his conduct, the holiness of his ways, and the power of his grace. How glorious is it to God to make himself beloved by men at the expense of all things, without the allurement of any sensible good whatever, and purely for his own sake! This is a proof of his existence, a mark of his greatness, of the truth of his religion, and of the power of his grace, and of the triumph of his faith. A moment of hunger here, in order to be filled with God himself to all eternity!—is not that too little for so immense a happiness?

— Blessed *are ye* that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

We are at first born to weep, because we are born sinners; we are born again to laugh, because we are then born children of God, and of the resurrection of Christ, and joint

heirs of his eternal joy. Let us in this life submit ourselves to the penance of the children of Adam, if we would eternally enjoy the inheritance of the children of God. This is the order appointed by God; and wo be to him who would establish a different one for himself, by placing joy in this world and tears in the other: the alternative is necessary and unavoidable. Blessed is that person who makes the necessary tears of this life a voluntary sacrifice, the object of his desires, and a subject of joy, by considering and reflecting upon them in Christ, and uniting them to his.

22. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

God would have such disciples and ministers as are not at all fond either of the friendship of men, or of the comfort of society, or of the conveniences of life, or of the favours of the great, or of their own reputation, but who are disposed to embrace the directly contrary. Men are but too happy when they are exposed to the hatred of the world, and to all the consequences of it, for the cause of Christ; but then they must make this cause their sole business and concern, which is a thing not very common. Where wilt thou find such persons, O Lord, if thou dost not form them thyself by thy all-powerful grace!

23. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

The belief of heavenly enjoyments is a very great treasure, which causes men to receive even with joy the greatest evils of this life. He is not in the least worthy of the cross of Christ who bears it with regret; and he knows not the value of it who feels not on this account a true joy at the bottom of his heart. Would not one be apt to say, that the disciples and ministers of Christ are scarce paid with any thing but promises for all which they do and suffer for his sake? But these promises are ready money to every one who has faith.

24. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.

Can a man read these words with faith, and yet love riches; or is it not rather a sign that he has but little faith, and that

this little is very weak? This is a terrible sentence against those who receive their whole joy and consolation from riches; a wholesome admonition for those who are continually in danger of setting their affections too much upon them, and a comfort to those who make them instrumental to the support and comfort of the poor. Lord, there must be a miracle of thy hand to hinder man from pronouncing a woe against poverty, while thou thyself utterest this denunciation, "Woe unto you that are rich!"

25. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.

If Christ says, "Woe unto those that are full," what will he say to those whose daily meals are great feasts, who, as it were, make profession of a life of good cheer and sensuality, who deny their taste and appetite nothing? If to be always at a plentiful table be not indeed a sin, it is, at least, a misfortune to be always exposed to a temptation, and to the occasion of being full, and something more. The hunger and thirst of a wicked rich man will not always be of one and the same kind. Their hunger after God, or rather their rage, in eternally perceiving within themselves a natural motion toward the supreme and sovereign good, from which they will find themselves eternally rejected and repelled,—this will be the most grievous hunger of the damned.

— Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.

A life which consists altogether of joy and diversion, is the life of a reprobate. Is it not to insult justice, for a criminal to turn his prison into a scene of delights, and lead the life of a Sardanapalus, while, at the same time, the sentence of his condemnation is preparing? A man who hurts and wrongs nobody, and lives in a constant succession of pleasures, passes his life innocently according to the notion of abundance of people; but is this the notion which is here given us by Christ? They will certainly perceive the contrary, but they will perceive it too late, in that day of mourning and weeping which shall never have an end!

26. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

A man might free himself from this enchantment of riches,

good cheer, and pleasures, did not flattery, as it were, shut the gate against his return. It is a very great misfortune for the rich and great to be exposed thereto; but it is a much greater for false prophets, teachers, and spiritual directors to be praised and honoured by the world, for it is a sign that the world is pleased with them; and a man cannot please the world but at the expense of Christ and the gospel. A commerce of flattery between the great and their spiritual directors, is a source of infinite evils and misfortunes. When they come to settle the account, the gain on both sides will be hell and eternal damnation.

SECT. IV.—THE LOVE OF ENEMIES.—PATIENCE.—WE MUST LEND, HOPING FOR NOTHING AGAIN.

27. ¶ But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

Let us love our enemies in heart, in word, and in deed: this is the perfection of the new law, and the lesson which we learn of Christ when we hear him as we ought. The true proof of the love of enemies is, 1st, To wish; 2d, To do them good; 3d, To speak well of them; and 4th, To procure them all the good we can. The gospel retaliation, the revenge of those who hearken not to their passion, but to Christ, consists in doing more good than they receive evil. "Love" not their errors, their defects, or their wicked behaviour, but their persons. "Do good to them," not such good as may make them worse, be prejudicial to their salvation, and confirm them in evil, but which may be instrumental to their conversion. "Bless them," not in speaking to them with a flattering and mean-spirited gentleness, which will only make them more insolent, but after such a manner as savours neither of bitterness nor revenge. "Pray for them," not in order to obtain for them temporal prosperity, but only such things as are necessary for this life and the other.

29. And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not *to take thy* coat also.

The 5th proof of the love of enemies, is the being disposed to suffer from them affronts, contempt, and ill treatment.

The 6th, To suffer even more at their hands. The 7th, To relinquish our goods, rather than to lose our meekness and charity toward them. Ever since our blessed Saviour suffered his enemies to take away his life, it is by his patience that we must regulate our own. Let us leave the use of our Creator's permission to the Jews and to the imperfect: the example and the gospel of our Redeemer are the perfection of the law, and the true pattern of Christians.

30. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again.

Self-love understands not this language, but faith and charity do. We may lawfully give alms with choice, but not with respect of persons, or by an arbitrary and groundless preference. He who expects an inheritance in heaven, is but little concerned about his earthly goods. Christ does not condemn either laws or the use of them: he only delivers one which is more perfect. This, indeed, appears no other than a folly to carnal men; but we must follow Christ in the foolishness of his morality, as well as in that of his cross. The power of God, and the salvation of men, are affixed to the one as well as to the other.

31. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

How bright and clear is this rule of equity toward our neighbour; and how many cases of conscience would it decide, if it were sincerely consulted on all occasions. Our self-love blinds us, and renders us unjust to our neighbour; and it is this very self-love which must serve to enlighten and set us right in respect of that which is owing to him. By changing persons, and putting ourselves in his place, and him in our own, we shall more easily discover our injustice and our duty. It is only by thy grace, O Jesus, that we can attain to a practical and saving knowledge in this matter.

32. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

It is the property of the Christian religion, and which shows that that alone is the true, not only to make known the corruption of nature, to correct its errors, and reform its disorders, but even to raise it above itself, to bring it near

to God, and, by a universal charity, to frame its conduct according to that of the Sovereign Being; while the sages of false religions, like people of a bad life, love those only who love them.

33. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

A man ought to tremble with fear, if, besides the external part of religion, he finds nothing in life but what may be found in a Turk or a heathen. Those who signalize themselves by great acts of liberality, make no other discovery, but only that they are entirely influenced by self-love, if, while they load those with favours who love or flatter them, they do nothing but mischief to such as oppose them, and no manner of good to those who are indifferent to them.

34. And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

To make our neighbour purchase the assistance which we give him, is to profit by his misery, and to increase it, under pretence of alleviating it. In vain do we flatter ourselves that we have a Christian heart, if we love not our brother after a Christian manner: we do not love him after a Christian manner when we do not love him for God's sake; and we love him not for God's sake, when we seek somewhat else besides God in doing him good.

35. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil.

Observe here the tenderness, sincerity, extent, disinterestedness, pattern, and reward of Christian charity. A religion which has for its foundation the union of God with man in the same person, and the death of this God-man for his enemies; which consists, on earth, in the reconciliation of the Creator with his creatures, by a mercy pure and unmixed, and a grace altogether free; and which is to subsist, in heaven, only in the union of the members with their head, consummated in the unity of God: could such a religion as this in the least approve of the hatred of enemies? In necessity, every thing ought to be in common between those who possess Christ in common upon earth, and who are to possess God as their joint inheritance in heaven.

36. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

Man, in the state of innocence, made in the image and after the likeness of his Creator, ought to have borne the image of his majesty upon earth, by his dominion over himself and over all creatures. Man, fallen from innocence, and become altogether animal and like the beasts themselves by his sinful birth, bears everywhere the image of his own misery. Man, become Christian, who is the work of the divine mercy, ought continually to bear the image, and, as one may say, to wear the badge of this perfection, there being scarce any other in God which he has now to imitate. Thou art, O my God, all mercy toward me; grant that I may be all mercy toward my brethren, for thy sake.

SECT. V. NOT TO JUDGE.—THE BLIND LEADERS OF THE BLIND.—THE MOTE AND BEAM IN THE EYE.

37. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:

There are four kinds of mercy to be exercised. The first consists in not judging of secret intentions when they do not appear by the actions; in renouncing that inquisitive, rash, and malicious desire which puts us upon searching into the heart. In vain do we flatter ourselves with being innocent, in not openly declaring the disadvantageous judgment which we form inwardly concerning our neighbour. The pleasure which we take in lessening him in our own minds, out of envy or vanity, does not, by being secret, cease to be criminal. How great is the goodness of God, in being so willing to put our judgments into our own hands, as to engage himself not to enter into judgment with us, provided we do not usurp the right, which belongs solely to him, of judging the heart!

—Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned:

The second sort of mercy inclines us, not to condemn those rigidly and unmercifully whose faults are certain and visible; to lessen, conceal, and excuse them as much as we can, without prejudice to truth and justice; and to be far from aggravating or divulging them, or desiring the punishment of them. It is no other than the blindness of a madman, to expose himself to the rigour and severity of the divine vengeance, rather than to show some indulgence and tenderness toward his own brother.

—Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

The third kind of mercy extends to the forgiving the injuries we have received. To imitate herein the mercy of God, is not a bare counsel, since it is proposed as a necessary means in order to receive mercy. That which man has to pardon in man is almost a mere nothing; that which he owes to God is an infinite debt: and yet he cannot resolve to embrace so advantageous an exchange! But in the passion of revenge their is neither faith nor reason.

38. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

The fourth sort of mercy requires us to give or lend to others in necessity. Charity ought to make no difficulty of giving that which truth promises to restore. It is not sufficient for Christian charity, either not to exact rigorously what is our due, or not to insist upon satisfaction for injuries; but we must give of our own to those who have need of it. Let us give, neither out of a mere human generosity, nor out of vanity or interest; but for the sake of God, if we would have him place it to account. There is no such thing as true generosity but only in God, because there is none but he who receives no advantage from his gifts, and because he engages himself even to pay the debts of his creatures with an excessive interest. Since he promises to do this, it is piety in us to hope for and expect it. So great is the goodness of God, that when he might have absolutely commanded us to give to our neighbour, he vouchsafes to invite us to this duty by the prospect of a reward, and to impute that to us as desert which he has a right to exact of us by the title of his sovereignty over our persons and estates.

39. And he spake a parable unto them; Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?

A man has no love for his own soul who puts it under the direction of a blind person. One cannot possibly have a guide too clear-sighted among all the temptations and dangers of this life. It is a very great misfortune to fall by chance into the hands of a blind guide; but to seek after such a one,

and to be afraid of finding one who is too clear-sighted, is such a folly as could never be imagined were it not so very common. It belongs to thee, O Lord, to send these guides, to form and instruct them, and to be thyself the Guide of these very guides of thy elect, and to cause them to be earnestly prayed for and chosen as they ought.

40. The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

A blind guide, an ignorant director, a pastor who knows not the ways of the gospel,—what can they do but ruin all, both in souls and in the church? It is the ignorance of pastors which is the occasion of the ignorance relating to the true worship of God, of superstitious practices, abuses, disorders, etc. Ignorance is a greater scourge to the church than vice, because it is more capable of destroying its foundation, which is faith, and because it has a greater train of ill consequences.

41. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Ignorance is, as it were, a beam in the eyes of those who should enlighten others. They are generally not at all sensible, either of this ignorance, or of the evils which it causes in the church. One very dangerous effect of ignorance is, that it raises great disputes in the church, when, either through ignorance or passion, (which is another beam which blinds even more than ignorance,) men blame in a doctrine (which is the eye of a minister of Christ) that which is not blamable; and when they take error for truth, and truth for error. He who thoroughly examines himself, is not very ready to find fault with others.

42. Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

It is a strange folly, that men will not endeavour to instruct and heal themselves before they undertake to instruct and heal others. It is no other than a continual state of hypocrisy, for a man to take upon him a ministry which consists in directing and instructing souls, and to make a show of exer-

cising these functions, when he is altogether unable to perform them by reason of his ignorance, his want of application, and perhaps his incapacity to learn the several duties of his station. More miserable still is he, who, to these imperfections, adds likewise open and apparent vices which scandalize the church instead of edifying it. There is no other remedy for such ministers but to retire, in order to cast this beam out of their eye, by repentance and the study of the Scriptures, and to leave to others the care of pulling the mote out of the eyes of their brethren.

SECT. VI.—THE FRUIT LIKE THE TREE.—THE GOOD AND EVIL TREASURE.—LORD, LORD.—THE HOUSE BUILT ON THE SAND.

43. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

We have a right to judge of the tree when its fruit appears, and of a spiritual director when his life and actions speak. Actions apparently disorderly, seducing words, and maxims contrary to the common faith of the whole church, are plain marks that the beam is in the eye, and that it is not safe to follow such a guide. Too great a reservedness, fear of judging rashly, and a blind submission to the judgment and conduct of a director, are no better than temptations of the devil, and an illusion, when God permits the veil of hypocrisy to be taken off, and covetousness to spread and manifest itself abroad. On the other side, it is great injustice, and an intolerable rashness, to judge ill of those in whom nothing but goodness appears, and to decry such pastors and directors whose fruits testify that they are good trees, planted by God in his church for the nourishment and shelter of his elect.

44. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramblebush gather they grapes.

We may judge of the heart by the works. The fruits of a carnal heart are uncleanness, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, envyings, revelling, etc., Gal. v. 19–21. The fruits of a spiritual heart are love, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, etc., ver. 22, 23. Good fruits do not consist in fine discourses, nor in some remark-

able actions, but in the whole tenor of the life and conversation, when it diffuses the sweet odour of Christ's life, and makes known the power of his Spirit. In times of seducement, we ought earnestly to beg of God a discerning spirit, attention, prudence, fidelity, knowledge, and the like; and, above all, purity of heart, which is necessary in order to know God and the men of God, and to distinguish that which proceeds from his Spirit.

45. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

Charity is the source of all good, concupiscence the origin of all evil. A good heart always makes itself known by the good which proceeds from it, what holy artifice soever humility may use in order to hide it; all the actions of the life still savouring of the principle which produces them, and of the end to which they are directed. The corrupt heart, for the same reason, cannot always lie concealed, what precaution soever hypocrisy takes to that purpose, because one passion betrays another. Nothing can suppress the voice of works, which are the tongue of the heart.

46. ¶ And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

God judges of the heart, not by words, but by works. He only mocks God, who calls him Lord and does not obey his commandments. A good servant never disputes, speaks little, and always follows his work. Such a servant a good Christian is; such is a faithful minister: always intent either on the work of his own salvation, or on that of his neighbour; speaking more to God than to men, and to these as in the presence of God; and following the light of his law, without pretending to make himself the judge of it by human reasonings. The tongue is, as it were, a pump, which empties the heart, but neither cleanses nor fills it. The love of God is a hidden spring, which supplies the heart continually, never leaves it dry, and always fills it afresh, by means of good works and fidelity in doing the will of God.

47. Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like:

Important words, which give us a lively picture of a true

Christian. Since it is Christ himself who promises to draw it, he well deserves our whole attention. We desire extremely to know what an elect or a reprobate is; let us learn it from the mouth of him who makes the elect what they are, but produces not the least part of that in reprobates which renders them such. He who comes to Christ by faith, who reads, hears, and meditates on his word with faith, and by persevering in the practice of his gospel lives thus by faith,—this person is an elect of God. He who persists in doing the contrary, is a reprobate.

48. He is like a man which built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock.

There is no solid piety but in the practice of the gospel. Works are the seal of faith. Let men make as many comments as they please upon the gospel; let them exhaust their invention in framing nice distinctions, to excuse themselves with some sort of probability from the practice of it: all this is but sand, which the flood of God's wrath will wash away, so long as the firm rock of the gospel is not the foundation and rule of their life.

49. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

All consists in doing good. In vain does a man flatter himself with being of the number, if he does not lead the life of the predestinate; and this life consists not in an external forwardness to hear the word, but in an inward fidelity in the practice of it. It is neither by the speculations of astrologers, nor by the Calvinian assurance of predestination, that we can discover what will be our portion forever; but it is by the examination of our heart, and the consideration of our life, that we may in some measure prognosticate our eternal state. Without the support of good works, all is ruinous, both at the hour of temptation and in the day of wrath.

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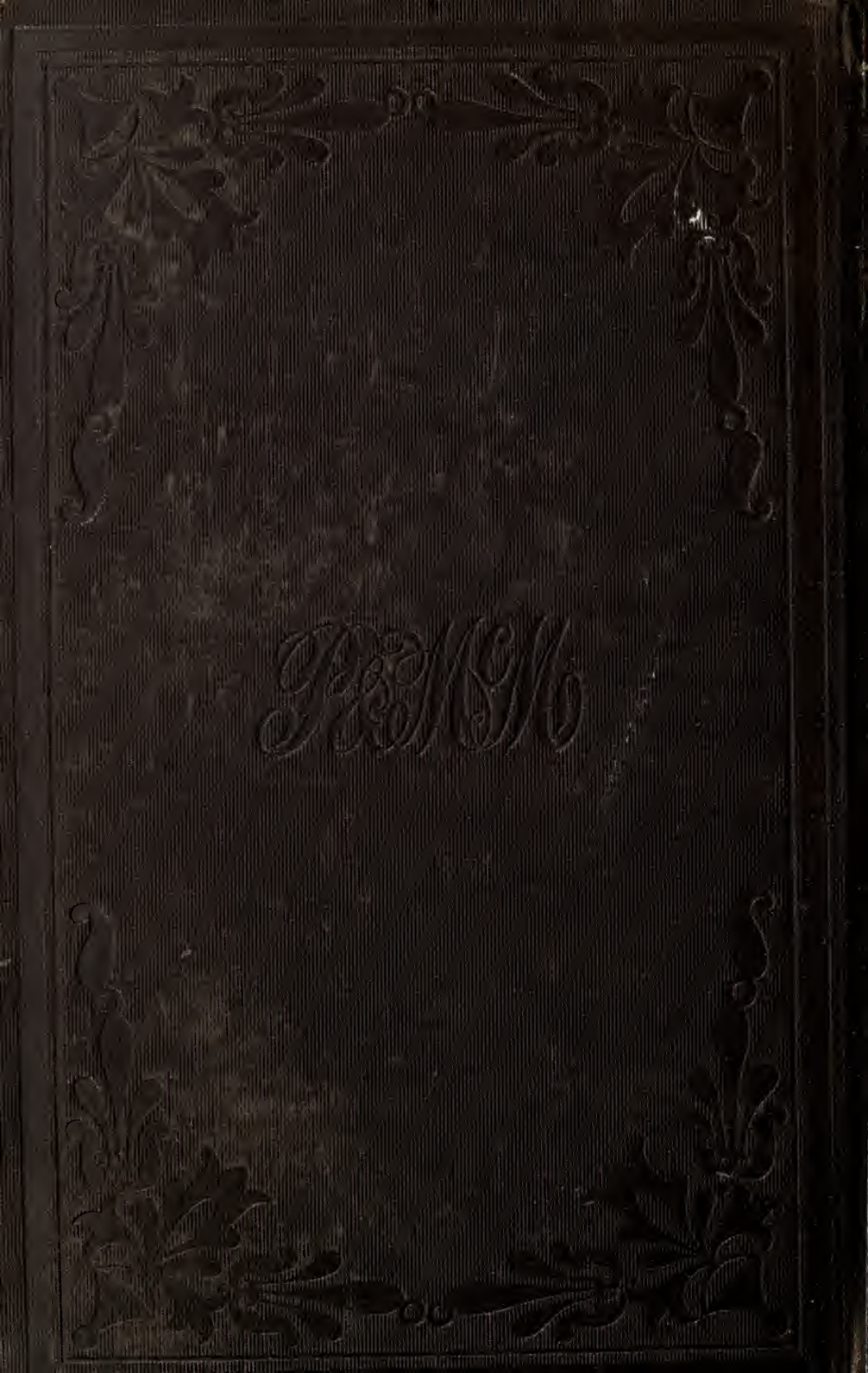
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